



**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**

**TUESDAY, 19 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.

## **APPEARANCES**

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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9 am.**

Appearances:

Cheyne, Ms Tara, Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Pryce, Mr David, Deputy Director-General, Access Canberra

Bayer, Ms Madelin, Senior Director, Environment Protection Authority, Access Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning everyone, and welcome. I declare open the second online public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity into the ACT budget 2021-22. In the proceedings today we will be hearing from the Minister for Business and Better Regulation, the Minister for Climate Action and the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment.

Before we begin, on behalf of the committee I would like to acknowledge that we meet today on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution that they make to the life of this city and the region.

In the first session this morning we will hear from the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome and thank Minister Cheyne and officials for appearing today. I understand that you have been forwarded a copy of the privilege statement. Could each of you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Ms Cheyne:** I have read and understood the privilege statement.

**Mr Pryce:** I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I also 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 if you use the words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We will not invite opening statements, so we will start off with some questions. Minister, there was an operational undertaking of the EPA, in terms of the enforceable undertaking, regarding the Caltex service station in Holt earlier this year. My understanding is that this type of complaint is the first of its nature. Could you give us the details of that complaint, where it is up to and what the outcome is?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes. For those who may not recall, on 14 February 2020, the EPA was advised that approximately 80,000 litres of petrol had been lost from an underground fuel storage tank located in Holt, in Kippax, and it had entered the environment. Eighty thousand litres is about the size of a residential swimming pool. Caltex, fortunately, immediately emptied the tank and it was taken out of use. They undertook

extensive work to pump out and recover leaked petrol. The EPA then issued an environmental protection order on Caltex to remove the product.

Following the incident, Caltex approached the EPA about an enforceable undertaking. An enforceable undertaking—and I will hand over to officials to go into more detail about what it looks like in practical terms—is a voluntary agreement, but it is one that is legally binding between the EPA and the party that is alleged to have breached the environmental legislation.

Generally, undertakings involve commitments regarding responding to an alleged breach. Essentially, they almost offset the negative environmental outcome that resulted from the breach in the first place. It is provided under section 136F of the act. We received this at the start of this year. We agreed to it in principle in March. It was then executed in May.

Under the undertaking Ampol, which was formerly known as Caltex, agreed to pay \$150,000 to the Ginninderry Conservation Trust as well as \$50,000 to the Ginninderra Catchment Group. Mr Cain and Ms Clay, who are here for the hearing, would be aware that the Ginninderra Catchment Group is particularly involved in improving the health of the Ginninderra catchment and the Murrumbidgee River.

It also flagged that if Ampol contravened that enforceable undertaking, the EPA can exercise its powers to compel performance, and the undertaking can only be withdrawn under written agreement. I will hand over to Ms Bayer, who is a senior official within the EPA, to provide some more information and give an update of what has happened since.

**Ms Bayer:** To confirm what the minister has already said, that agreement is ongoing between now-Ampol, previously Caltex, and the Environment Protection Authority. It compels performance of that undertaking. If Ampol contravenes that enforceable undertaking, the EPA can exercise its powers to compel performance, as I said. It is an ongoing agreement. We have had confirmation that those amounts have been paid to the relevant groups, and that agreement continues to be in effect.

**THE CHAIR:** If this situation happened and the company or the business did not want to voluntarily enter into an enforceable undertaking, are there any grounds for the government to be able to force them to do so?

**Ms Bayer:** The EPA cannot force an entity to enter into an enforceable undertaking. It is a voluntary option. But the EPA does have those alternative options in terms of environment protection orders or prosecutions to try and achieve a similar outcome. In this instance Ampol did approach the EPA and come forward with this suggestion.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Learning from this experience, are enforceable undertakings something that the EPA sees as part of its toolkit going forward? Has it been a good outcome? I would be interested in your learnings there.

**Mr Pryce:** As a regulatory agent, we have a whole suite of tools available to us; enforceable undertakings are one of those tools. Of course, in this case, we would prefer the incident not to have occurred, but when an environmental incident like this

has occurred, we are looking for a regulatory outcome that benefits the community and upholds what we are trying to achieve under the Environment Protection Act.

In this case, noting that the offending party had offered to go down the enforceable undertaking path, we saw that as the best regulatory outcome all round, noting that if we were to proceed with prosecution there is always risk with that, and the outcome may not be similar. You may get a finding of guilt or you may not get a penalty; you do not actually get the return.

This one offered us a chance to return back to our community. You would all have seen the media reporting from the community groups, saying that the moneys they are now being given through this enforceable undertaking have enabled them to do environmental work that they would not otherwise have been able to do. Of course, we would have preferred that the circumstances had not led to this. But having led to that, Mr Braddock, we see this as a very good outcome, all things considered.

**MS CASTLEY:** I have a question on the time line. Were you happy with how quickly it was identified and how quickly you resolved it and got the outcome?

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Bayer, I will turn to you.

**Ms Bayer:** Yes. The Environment Protection Authority was advised on 14 February. Caltex, as was noted before, immediately emptied the tanks; then the order from the EPA was issued on 3 March. Things did move quite quickly once Caltex identified that there had been a leak. The EPA was notified and, yes, we were satisfied with their notification to us.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I am after some more detail in terms of the budget and resourcing for the EPA; I could not find those amongst the budget papers. Can you detail your staffing levels and operational budget, and give an overview of how it is allocated to the various functions?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will turn almost immediately to Mr Pryce to detail that. In terms of the EPA, as with other Access Canberra functions like our contact centres or our service centres, the appropriation for our activities is in Access Canberra as a whole, under the Access Canberra appropriation. There are not necessarily separate line items for the different functions. Mr Pryce will be able to talk in more detail about staffing and funding.

**Mr Pryce:** That is correct. The EPA is not an agency in and of itself; it sits within Access Canberra. There is an executive that sits over the top; then Senior Director Madelin Bayer is my delegated statutory officer at the Environment Protection Authority. I will let her detail her team composition and resourcing. As an agency, we apply our overall funding envelope against whatever the priorities are for government and ourselves as an agency, based on the data, harm and risk. I will let Madelin detail the particular staffing composition.

**Ms Bayer:** The office of the Environment Protection Authority within Access Canberra is made up of 17 FTE but 18 actual staff; two of those staff job-share one position. The authority has three teams within it: the water regulation team, which has

three staff; the environment protection team, which has seven staff; and the environmental quality team, which has seven staff. That adds up to 17, including me.

**MS CASTLEY:** Like Andrew, I was looking forward to understanding the overall budget. I noted in the budget outlook—I think it is on page 315—for 2020-21, it was a lot more than it was for this year. Can you explain why there was a significant reduction in funding?

**Mr Pryce:** I will go to the page number.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, are you referring to the previous budget?

**MS CASTLEY:** On page 315 it has dropped by a quarter, from my reading of the main lines. It shows that the figure for environmental protection in 2020-21 was nearly \$312 million. This year it has dropped to almost \$234 million. I am wondering why there is a reduction there.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, could you let us know which budget paper you are referring to, explicitly? Is it the budget outlook for 2020-21?

**MS CASTLEY:** Budget outlook for 2021-22—the current budget outlook paper.

**Ms Cheyne:** On what page?

**MS CASTLEY:** Page 315. With respect to environmental protection, if you look at the interim outcome for 2020-21, it is \$311,579,000. For the current year it is \$233,584,000—quite a reduction. Can you explain that?

**Mr Pryce:** I can do my best. We might have to take it on notice because, as I said, the Environment Protection Agency within Access Canberra is just a team and a branch within the agency. That, as I understand it, relates across the whole budget setting, not just CMTEDD and Access Canberra. There are variables there that are outside my purview.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, under that environmental protection heading, you will see that there are functions within Minister Vassarotti's portfolio and Minister Steel's portfolio.

**MS CASTLEY:** But the bottom line still shows that, for environmental protection, last year it was \$126,631,000, and this year it is \$28,170,000. That is a 75 per cent decrease. Who can answer this? Is it Minister Steel or Minister Vassarotti? Within Access Canberra, is anyone able to explain the figures to us?

**Ms Cheyne:** We will take that on notice, Ms Castley. We may need to have a conversation with our colleagues in the other directorates regarding how this has been compiled.

**MS CASTLEY:** I would like to understand, if that is the case, how the EPA is expected to function as well as it has been, with 17 staff. It cannot be that much of a reduction, or saving—

**Mr Pryce:** Ms Castley, with respect to the part that I can answer, I can confirm that the EPA's resourcing has not dropped at all over the time that I have been head of Access Canberra. In fact, you could argue it has been supplemented through some additional resources that we have been applying across the agency to support our regulatory efforts more broadly. We will have to take the broader question on notice because it does comprise the whole of environmental protection. Our aim is to uphold the regulatory elements of environment protection, and we continue to do that.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you, Mr Pryce. But with a 75 per cent decrease, I imagine it will have to affect something, somewhere.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, I recommend having a closer look as well, as "n.e.c." represents funding that is not classified elsewhere. It may be, with respect to how the funding is presented, that it is captured under another line item in that table. We are not directly responsible for preparing this table, so we will seek some advice. But you can be assured by Mr Pryce that there has not been a reduction in the EPA's functions or staffing.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you. You have taken it on notice; can I just confirm that?

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, I have taken it on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** Eradication of invasive plants, animals and diseases: is that an area that we can talk about with the EPA?

**Ms Cheyne:** No.

**MS CASTLEY:** It is not part of the EPA?

**Ms Cheyne:** No.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, there is a growing movement of climate litigation. The New South Wales EPA was recently sued by bushfire survivors who claimed that the EPA had not done enough to reduce climate pollution. Has our EPA had a chance to review that particular decision and climate litigation in general?. Are you resourced to consider what that means for our EPA here and to respond to it?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will hand over to officials, Ms Clay.

**Mr Pryce:** Ms Clay, thanks for the question. Yes, we are aware of those legal matters and actions that have been taken. We are looking at it with great interest. We are working with our policy colleagues in the Environment, Protection and Sustainable Development Directorate on that. It does raise policy issues, first and foremost, so we will feed in through that. I know Minister Vassarotti has sought further information from us and from her directorate. We are preparing briefing materials as part of that request. We are watching that with very close interest.

**MS CLAY:** Do you think it is likely to lead to a need for greater resources within our Environment Protection Authority and our other enforcers who are working at the

front lines of climate change and environmental protection?

**Mr Pryce:** As I said we are still working through what the actual outcomes and findings mean. We will be providing advice to Minister Vassarotti. Obviously, there would be a number of options for the minister to consider, and it would be inappropriate for me to speculate.

**MS CLAY:** When do you think it is likely that that advice might be complete?

**Mr Pryce:** I cannot give you a time frame, other than that we are working quickly to give that advice. From an environment protection perspective, again, I am acutely interested in that, noting the risk to government.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, I have a question regarding the environment protection guidelines for construction and land development in the ACT. I have a copy in front of me here, a draft version of that document, dated October 2019. Minister, is that document still in draft?

**Ms Cheyne:** I am just pulling it up myself, Mr Cain. I will check whether Ms Bayer has a further update for us.

**MR CAIN:** I am sorry that the document is not higher on your radar, Minister. It seems to be a very significant contribution.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, the minister is just looking for the document.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you. It is a document on the government website, and it is an EPA document.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, could you state the title of it again, please?

**MR CAIN:** The document I am looking at is called *Draft environment protection guidelines for construction and land development in the ACT*. I am obviously very interested in what has happened to that draft, which is under the EPA's purview.

**Ms Cheyne:** I do not have the draft in front of me, Mr Cain. I have the previous confirmed document—

**Mr Pryce:** March 2011.

**Ms Cheyne:** 2011.

**MR CAIN:** I have a 2019 document in front of me. I just did a simple Google search—October 2019.

**Mr Pryce:** We might have to take it on notice.

**Ms Cheyne:** Yes, we will have to take it on notice, Mr Cain.

**MR CAIN:** Thank you. I have some other questions regarding that document; please

take them on notice as well. What is the plan for this draft document? When will it be completed? Once it is completed, will it be publicly available?

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, I am confirming this, but I think this might have been drafted within EPSDD, with the Minister for the Environment. I will take that on notice so that we can consult with the Minister for the Environment and confirm that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Minister, are you able to outline the number and nature of complaints that the EPA has received over the last year?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will hand over directly to Ms Bayer, who will be able to provide some detail. She might be able to provide details of some of the significant issues that the EPA has responded to, including during lockdown.

**Ms Bayer:** In the last financial year, 2020-21, the EPA received a total of 2,507 complaints. Breaking those down into some major categories, 2,046 of those related to noise, 307 were in relation to air pollution, 56 were in relation to land contamination, 49 were in relation to waterways, and 34 were in relation to light pollution.

**THE CHAIR:** In terms of the noise complaints, that is a very substantial part of the complaints.

**Ms Bayer:** It is.

**THE CHAIR:** Again, is there any breakdown of what is dominating that? Is there any way to work with the community to reduce that number of complaints?

**Ms Bayer:** Would you like me to run through some of the major categories of those noise complaints?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Bayer:** In terms of percentages for 2020-21, this is just in relation to noise, to begin with: for 49 per cent, the category is “amplified”, which is amplified music; 22 per cent is in relation to construction noise; 11 per cent is in relation to mechanical plants and equipment, which includes things like air conditioners; five per cent is in relation to vehicles; and three per cent is in relation to gym equipment. There are some others that are very low percentages, as well.

**MS CASTLEY:** I am wondering about the time frame. How quickly were the complaints dealt with? Was there any legal action required?

**Ms Bayer:** In terms of the time frames, that can vary quite greatly. I can take it on notice in relation to some specifics. That can vary quite greatly, depending on the type of noise that is complained about. Some noise can be addressed quite quickly—music and things of that nature. With respect to other noise, such as air conditioners, it might take longer to try and resolve that complaint. It can vary quite greatly.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do you have an idea of the total cost to your agency—how much it costs your staff to look into these things?

**Mr Pryce:** It is hard. It would take some effort. We would have to take that on notice, if that is what you wish, to break that down as a particular category.

**MS CASTLEY:** Yes, thank you.

**Mr Pryce:** There are a number of variables involved.

**MS CASTLEY:** Great. Thank you.

**MS CLAY:** Of your 2,507 complaints, over 2,000 are from noise, so less than 500 are from other sources, including air pollution. Does that match up with the priorities that the EPA would set for themselves? If you were saying what the most important areas to focus on were, as the Environment Protection Authority, would you put the same level of resources into those?

**Mr Pryce:** Again we have an accountability framework within Access Canberra that sets out that we focus on risk and harm to the community. Under the Environment Protection Act there are specific requirements there for us to manage those harms and risks. With respect to a lot of the environmental complaints that relate to individuals, for that individual, whatever the impact is on them, whether it is noise or wood-fire smoke, that is the most significant thing. We have a duty to uphold their protections, whether it is an individual or whether it is affecting broad parts of the community.

As a general statement, often the type of noise complaints are more individual or locally based. We still owe a duty to the complainant to investigate that as an environment protection authority. I talked in my first answer about regulatory outcomes. Often they are an element of a noise complaint, a neighbourhood dispute or some other sort of factor, and that is just one of the aggravating points. We try to assist the parties that are involved. Sometimes we use the conflict resolution service and things like that to try and resolve it, because there are other underlying tensions and noise is just one factor.

For us as an agency, my focus is more on those environmental things that cause significant harm to and impacts on the community more broadly. That is where I would like to apply our resources, and I would like to apply our resources in preventing them rather than responding to them.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you for talking about your framework of risk of harm to the community. What about risk of harm to the environment? Is that included as part of the assessment?

**Mr Pryce:** Absolutely. Madelin, do you want to outline that a bit more, with respect to the Environment Protection Authority?

**Ms Bayer:** In terms of how we include our assessment of risk of harm to the environment?

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes. How do you allocate your resources regarding what is basically a mountain of noise complaints, which I understand are very important to

the individuals involved, and weigh them up against those matters which might be causing considerable harm to the environment?

**Ms Bayer:** The officers that work within the Environment Protection Authority on a daily basis will be reacting and responding to those complaints that are made about, as you said, the large number of noise complaints and those other complaints that we receive. At the same time the authority will either receive a notification or a complaint about, as you are talking about, a more significant environmental concern. Resources will be prioritised at that point in time to go out and address that particular complaint or incident. Major pollution or environmental concerns would be given priority at any given time over more reactive complaints that we might be able to deal with at a later point in time, the next day or the following day.

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is around point source pollution and whether you are allocating enough resources to enable you to address this issue sufficiently. What resources does the EPA allocate for point source pollution and are we sufficiently addressing those issues?

**Ms Bayer:** Again, it is difficult to quantify exactly the resources that are put towards any one particular concern. I can take that on notice in terms of a more specific amount of time and resources spent on point source pollution.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, on 6 September the *CityNews* reported that partially treated sewage leaked into the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo, and that the EPA in New South Wales and ACT were notified. How did the EPA respond to this spill and how much has been spent on these responses?

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, are you talking about the spill from the lower Molonglo into the Murrumbidgee?

**MS CASTLEY:** Yes.

**Ms Cheyne:** On 5 September the EPA was advised that the bypass storage dam may reach 90 per cent during the daylight hours and had the potential to spill that night. You may recall that, over the weekend of 3, 4 and 5 September, we had a very large amount of rainfall. The EPA was then advised that the bypass storage dam spillway had commenced discharging partially treated effluent at about a quarter to eight in the evening of that same day. Event-based sampling was then undertaken, with regular sampling, which occurred for the duration of that spill. Icon Water are the environmental authorisation holder for this activity and they confirmed their reporting requirements with the EPA for this event.

The EPA was advised both before and during the event occurring that the authorisation holder, Icon, had followed its required processes for this type of event. These processes also included advising New South Wales residents downstream of the spill about what had occurred and what they needed to do, or indeed not do, in response. The EPA was advised that the samples underwent laboratory analysis. I understand that the EPA has continued to engage very closely with Icon since that occurred on 5 September.

**MS CASTLEY:** How much are we talking about in litres? How far down the river did it go? Surely, when it was getting to a high level, someone was alerted. Has a new process been put in place to make sure it does not get too close to the top, in case we do have rain?

**Ms Cheyne:** I will ask Ms Bayer to provide you with that level of detail, Ms Castley.

**Ms Bayer:** In answer to your first question, the total volume that spilled over out of the bypass dam was 20 megalitres. To put that in context, at the time that it spilled over, and noting all of the rainfall, as the minister outlined, that was less than 0.1 per cent of the river flow of the Murrumbidgee River at that point in time. Samples were taken at that time, then following, and it was found that there was very minimal environmental impact. I am not aware of exactly how far the spill went down the river. I can take that on notice and try to find out, but it had a very minimal environmental impact and was, as I said, less than 0.1 per cent of the river flow at that point in time.

**MS CASTLEY:** Have new processes been put in place to manage the levels? Can you take that on notice?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, on notice.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, we did not hear it; so you will need to state it again.

**MS CASTLEY:** The processes to manage the level so that it does not overflow again when we have big rain coming. Is there a process? I would like to know about that.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Castley, that is probably a question best directed to Icon.

**MS CASTLEY:** Why? Are you guys not managing it?

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Castley, we will move on to Ms Clay. Do you have a substantive question?

**MS CLAY:** I do. I am interested in the 307 complaints about air pollution; how many of those are about wood smoke and whether you resolved them. I am also interested in how that level of complaints compared to whatever level of air pollution complaints you received during the smoke apocalypse after the bushfires.

**Ms Cheyne:** Ms Clay, we will hand over again to Ms Bayer to provide you with that level of detail.

**Ms Bayer:** In 2020-21, with the air pollution complaints, I can break them down into 228 in relation to smoke, 45 in relation to odour, 29 in relation to dust and five in relation to toxic or poisonous gases—complaints about those.

**MS CLAY:** With the 228 smoke ones, were you able to resolve those satisfactorily, to the satisfaction of the complainant?

**Ms Bayer:** I can take that on notice in terms of the outcomes in each of those.

**MS CLAY:** That would be great. Can you give me the top-line figure of how that compares with the air pollution complaints you received during the smoke event after the bushfires?

**Ms Bayer:** For the 2019-20 financial year, we received 286 complaints about smoke. I can take it on notice and provide you with a more confined period, in terms of the December-January period, in comparison for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 periods.

**MS CLAY:** That would be great.

**Mr Pryce:** The Environment Protection Authority issued its air quality report for 2020 in June 2021. That report details a whole range of issues around air quality and air pollution, including the impacts of the bushfire smoke on our community. I point out that that is a very detailed analysis of all issues around air quality in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** How many air quality stations or air monitoring stations are there in the ACT?

**Mr Pryce:** My understanding is that the ACT monitoring network consists of three monitoring stations located at Monash, Civic and Florey.

**Ms Bayer:** I can confirm that that is on page 8 of the air quality report that Mr Pryce was referring to.

**MR CAIN:** This is perhaps more of a follow-up to my original line of questioning on the draft environment protection guidelines.

**Ms Cheyne:** Mr Cain, could I give you some information about that? It might guide your questioning. Under the administrative arrangements, while I am responsible for the authority, which provides the enforcement, Minister Vassarotti is responsible for environment protection policy. I have not looked at this document closely, but it is very clear that it has been drafted from within her directorate.

I do not have any officials from EPSDD in my directorate, so if you have questions about the guidelines specifically, and the policy and drafting stage, they are probably best directed to Minister Vassarotti. I will confirm that for you unequivocally in the remaining 17 minutes; if not, I will do so afterwards, so that you can direct your questions appropriately. The policy is drafted and, once that is confirmed, the EPA uses that policy with respect to implementation or enforcement. We are not necessarily the drafters of that policy.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, I do appreciate that you will come back with a full explanation. I reaffirm that the document is referred to as an EPA document. It is very much a document that I believe originated in EPA. One thing I am very interested in finding out is how much this document cost to produce and whether it is still a living document that is being progressed, either by you or by Minister Vassarotti.

**Ms Cheyne:** Minister Vassarotti's office has just confirmed with me that this does sit with her responsibilities. Again, environmental protection policy, which can then apply to how the EPA does its job, sits with Minister Vassarotti. You might say it has

been created within the EPA; it can apply to the EPA but be created within a different portfolio. The EPA does not sit within the EPSDD, as we have discussed today; it sits within Access Canberra. I have just confirmed for you unequivocally that these questions are best directed to Minister Vassarotti, who I understand will be appearing later this week.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, are you saying that that EPA does not—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Cain, you can put the questions on notice after the session, because you have had your supplementary and the minister has answered your question. Minister, has COVID had any significant impacts, positive or negative, on the activities of the EPA?

**Ms Cheyne:** COVID has had an impact on everything—absolutely, right across Access Canberra. Access Canberra is the regulator. The EPA has still undertaken its regulatory functions. I think we discussed during the annual report hearings how we can take some readings, including how close we can get sometimes in terms of noise readings. I will ask Mr Pryce to give a bit more detail, before we hand over to Ms Bayer.

**Mr Pryce:** To give an outline, because of the COVID impacts, we have been operating as an agency under business continuity arrangements. We have three service delivery states—effectively operating in a generally normal sense, one where there are some limitations, and a lockdown situation where significant restrictions apply.

During the lockdown, our activity had to be curtailed and reframed within those arrangements. While, as an essential government service, there is no limitation under the public health directions on us doing what we need to do, legislatively, for the protection of our staff and to meet our work health and safety obligations, we limit and minimise those exposures to those that are absolutely necessary.

To give a sense of that, during the lockdown, generally our staff would be working from home and doing desktop or remote follow-ups where possible. Any inspections would be limited and would be on an emergency or risk-harm basis. Our inspectors could turn out if there was an environmental incident that required it. We would modify our attendance to ensure there were those COVID protections. The EPA continued to operate throughout, continued to receive complaints and continued to investigate those matters. Madelin, do you want to add anything more from an operational perspective?

**Ms Bayer:** No, thank you. That covers our operations, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** Was there any substantial, notable difference in the nature of complaints? For example, were there more smoke complaints during that period, less noise complaints or anything that changed in the EPA's call-outs?

**Ms Bayer:** No, the EPA did not notice any significant changes in the types or numbers of complaints that we received during that time.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Given we have so many complaints within the noise and

pollution space in the local community where they often involve a dispute between two members of the community, has the EPA explored alternative dispute resolution measures or mediation as a potential way to be more effective in resolving those complaints, rather than getting heavy-handed regulation involved?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is a great question. We do have a noise portal, which you might be familiar with, which has a lot of information on it for people. Particularly, we have seen an increase in density in Gungahlin and Belconnen. I live in a high-rise myself. With that closer proximity, we have seen a bit of an increase in terms of air-conditioning noise complaints and similar things.

I will ask Ms Bayer to talk in more detail about what this looks like operationally, but we encourage people to have the conversation in the first place. You can appreciate that going from zero to having the EPA knocking on your door, giving you a call or writing you a letter, in terms of happy neighbourhoods, sometimes can create more tension than not. We encourage people to try and, quite simply, have a conversation in the first instance.

Where there are neighbourly noise complaints and perhaps a conversation has not resolved it, and some of the tips and tricks that we have on our noise portal have not gone far enough, the EPA does have an increasing amount of contact that it will make in the first instance.

I appreciate you are asking about dispute resolution, and that is part of the tools. I will ask Ms Bayer to talk to you in more detail about what it looks like as complaints are made and perhaps escalated.

**Ms Bayer:** In the first instance the person who is being complained about, the activity manager, will be sent a letter outlining that a complaint has been received about the particular activity—the noise or the smoke—and reminding that person about the obligations or the guidelines around whatever the activity might be. In a lot of cases that may be enough. The person may not even have been aware that they were bothering people or interfering with the amenity of the people who lived around them.

If another complaint is received or the activity does not stop, a warning letter can be sent, a second advice letter can be sent, and the EPA can try and speak to that person directly, and really step through the Access Canberra model of educate, engage and enforce. We really are trying, in the vast majority of cases, to educate and engage with the person to resolve the underlying issue—what is causing the noise, and helping that person to resolve that concern. As the minister said, with these residential neighbourhood disputes, the regulatory outcome that we are looking for is that the activity stops, and that people can get on with the rest of their activities.

**Mr Pryce:** Mr Braddock, that is a fantastic question. In Access Canberra we are currently bringing in binding conciliation from a consumer affairs point of view. I have been discussing with the EPA team and executive how we might approach noise complaints, as an example, differently, because of the volume and the impacts that they have at a local level, and see whether or not there is another way for us to apply our regulatory suite of tools around complaint conciliation. When you weigh up the relevant cost and the impacts, there may be a more effective process.

It is a very good point that you make, and it is certainly an area that we are looking at. It will form part of that briefing that I mentioned to Ms Clay—the briefing that we are providing to the Minister for the Environment, Ms Vassarotti, about opportunities and what more we can do in this space.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I will be very interested to see what you can do in that space. Maybe next year we will get an update on that.

**Ms Cheyne:** We will make a note of it, Mr Braddock, and give you an update next year.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, I would like to know about the complaints for waterways and whether you have had any related to the gross pollutant traps at Lake Tuggeranong and just behind the ANU.

**Ms Cheyne:** That is a good question, Ms Castley. With the gross pollutant traps at both Tuggeranong and ANU, I will have to check regarding ANU; I am not sure whether that comes within our responsibilities. Certainly, we monitor Lake Tuggeranong, so I will ask Ms Bayer whether we have had any of those complaints.

**Ms Bayer:** I can take that on notice in relation to complaints about those two specific areas.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, putting on your best environmental protection lens, what would be your single biggest priority for next year if you were not operating in a reactive environment?

**Ms Cheyne:** That is a great question, Ms Clay. It is hard to answer because we do talk about an affected person in an affected place and, absolutely, for some people something might seem inconsequential but a noise that is coming from a neighbour or a nearby business may quite genuinely be impacting on someone's quality of life.

I am very pleased with the way in which the EPA engages. We do respond very quickly when there are major environmental incidents. We touched on one before with Ms Castley's question about what happened at the lower Molonglo, but some others occurred during lockdown as well. Even in this COVID-reactive environment, we have also been responding very quickly, and we have very good engagement with different utilities and the broader community.

Overall, though, where we can be perhaps a bit more proactive is in increasing the navigation of our website and our services; that is something I would like us to focus on as we move out of a COVID-constrained environment. I believe that the EPA has a very good focus right across the board on ensuring that we are keeping the protections at front and centre.

On a personal level, blue-green algae is a constant community concern, particularly heading into this La Nina world that we are in. It is about working with Minister Vassarotti and Minister Gentleman on how we can ensure that our waterways are as healthy as possible. I think that benefits everything else.

That is certainly an area where I would like to see improvements made. From an enforcement or a regulatory perspective, it means that we have to work with the policy arms as well, to ensure that it is right from the beginning, so that, when we go and test or monitor, we are able to report back and have some good results.

**MS CASTLEY:** I want to go back to the draft environment protection guidelines document. I understand that it is coming from a different directorate. What impact does that have on the EPA? Are they consulted? If nobody has known about this document, does that mean there have been no complaints about construction and land development?

**Ms Cheyne:** No, Ms Castley, because there are existing guidelines. If you go to the Access Canberra environment protection guidelines webpage, there are guidelines within which EPA currently operates. They are dated March 2011, I believe, so we are very interested in getting an update on those draft guidelines, as I am sure you all are. Thank you, Mr Cain. Minister Vassarotti will be able to provide some more detail on that.

**MS CASTLEY:** Do the EPA get involved in this draft document development process?

**Ms Cheyne:** I would suspect so.

**Mr Pryce:** Yes, the policy agencies do consult, as part of their policy development cycle. Ultimately, they set the policy and we implement the operation.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, everyone, for your time today. On behalf of the ECCB committee, thank you, Minister Cheyne and officials, for your attendance. You will be sent a draft of the *Hansard* transcript for correction of minor errors. For any questions on notice, you have five working days to provide the secretariat with answers. That ends the first session.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Barr, Mr Andrew, Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Engele, Mr Sam, Coordinator General, Climate Action, Policy and Cabinet, Office for Climate Action

Lawton, Mr Kieran, Executive Branch Manager, Program Delivery, Office for Climate Action

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

Rutledge, Mr Geoffrey, Deputy Director-General, Environment, Water and Emissions Reduction Division

McGlynn, Mr Gene, Executive Group Manager, Climate Change and Energy Branch

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. This is the second session of the environment, climate change and biodiversity committee's inquiry into the budget 2021-22. In this session we will hear from the Minister for Climate Action. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome and thank Chief Minister Barr and officials for appearing 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 you each confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of that statement?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**Mr Engele:** I have read the privilege statement.

**Mr Lawton:** I understand the privilege statement.

**Mr Rutledge:** I acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Mr McGlynn:** I have read and agree to the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We are not inviting opening statements today so we will begin with some questions. Chief Minister, my first question is around the Sustainable Household Scheme. Are you able to give an update on the rollout of the scheme?

**Mr Barr:** It is progressing well. I guess the committee will be most interested in the facts and figures, so I will hand to Mr Engele.

**Mr Engele:** I will provide some facts and figures on the scheme. At this stage, 7,630 households have registered their interest to take part in the scheme and 97 businesses are now accredited to provide services under the scheme. It has been operating initially in pilot mode for a number of months. As part of that we ask that all participants undertake an Actsmart energy workshop. This workshop was about providing information to the pilot participants so that they were informed about the

process and understood the most effective things for their houses in terms of energy efficiency. That included things other than just items that were eligible under the scheme. It included other energy savings, such as reducing unnecessary draughts. It gave them an understanding about how the scheme would operate in terms of the products that were available.

In terms of the actual scheme numbers, as at 15 October, over 700 applications for loans have been made under the scheme. There have been 116 installed. The breakdown for the installations is 73 solar installations, 13 battery systems, 22 combined systems, five hot water heat pumps and three electrical heating and cooling systems. The average loan amount is \$10,800. The householders that have been installing batteries have also been able to take advantage of the next gen program, which was an existing rebate program for battery systems.

We have been adding additional products as part of the pilot and now as part of the full scheme. We are still working on electric vehicles as part of the next phase. About 2,200 people have registered their interest in the scheme for electric vehicles. The next stage of the scheme is to bring in community organisations. We are doing the work on that at the moment. There are some unique elements in terms of community organisations.

As part of the scheme rollout a range of consumer protections were factored in. The government, in last year's budget, allocated \$300,000 a year for that. Those consumer protections are aimed at really vulnerable households or those people that are not sophisticated consumers. That has funded the continuation of additional Actsmart workshops.

In relation to those Actsmart workshops, we are getting about a 400 to 500 per cent increase in the number of people that would normally attend those workshops. Since June 2021, 2,666 householders have attended a workshop. The feedback that we have been getting in relation to those workshops has been very good. We can provide some testimonials to that effect. Other elements in relation to the consumer protections are that all the solar and battery installers need to be Clean Energy Council accredited and they must have been operating in the ACT for the last 12 months.

In the ACT, as distinct from other jurisdictions, Access Canberra inspects every single solar and battery installation. Additional funding was provided as part of last year's budget for those additional inspectors. They have been operating as part of the scheme and we meet with the regulators on a regular basis. That is a fair amount of detail and I am happy to elaborate on any of those comments.

**THE CHAIR:** Just on the 7,000 who registered interest, do you expect the full 7,000 to take up the loans? What are your thoughts on the 7,000? Do you think there will be more that come in on top of that?

**Mr Engle:** Because we are in the early phases we think that quite a lot of those people who have registered interest will then convert into one of the loans, probably not 100 per cent. It is too early to understand what the exact percentage will be. We expect that they will be people who are interested in it, who are highly motivated and who have been following the rollout of the scheme. We think that most of the people

who have registered will take up loans. There will be an initial bump of interest and then we expect that over the course of the remaining years of the program we will have more people take part in the scheme. We expect that there will be an initial surge, that it will possibly fall off a little and that then it will continue to grow as more products get added to the scheme.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Castley.

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is about the providers of the scheme—for instance, the solar providers. We know that there are businesses outside of Canberra—businesses coming in from Sydney—coming in to do these installations. How can you guarantee that you are prioritising this work to ACT businesses?

**Mr Engle:** As part of the accreditation there is a requirement for the 12 months of operation in the territory. The retailers are all ACT businesses. There are no limitations on installers from subcontracting that work. It might be that you are referring to the subcontractors coming in to do the actual installs. That all fits in with the industry structure. We are seeing that the majority are ACT businesses and they have already got established local installers. I am not sure that there have been externals coming in to do a lot of installs. If you have any information, we are happy to take that on board.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Braddock.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I welcome the introduction of electric vehicles under the scheme. I question why e-bikes are not also included, because you could have quite significant emissions reductions if people replaced a second car with an e-bike.

**Mr Barr:** That has not been ruled out but, given the criteria around the size of the loan scheme, the minimum loan value and the value of those particular products and their ability to be purchased, it really would not require an interest-free loan for most. It has not been ruled out, but it is not a priority at the moment.

**MR BRADDOCK:** When is a decision likely to be made on that, Chief Minister?

**Mr Barr:** Not this year.

**MS LEE:** ACTCOSS has expressed some concern—and I think this is a concern that is shared within the community as well—that the Sustainable Household Scheme is geared towards benefiting those people who are home owners. Canberra's median price is now \$1 million. I understand that you spoke briefly about some of the other schemes that are available to low income earners, but they clearly do not have the same breadth of funding. Why is the government pursuing this scheme, which is going to be benefiting people who own their own homes and is going to come at a cost to people who are in private rental or indeed in social housing?

**Mr Barr:** It does not come at a cost to people who are in social housing or private rental. The majority of households in the ACT are privately owned. There is a separate scheme in relation to public housing that has been running, in terms of energy efficiency improvements, for more than a decade. In relation to private rentals,

this scheme is open to the landlords of those properties.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Out of the \$63 million being spent on climate action, a large portion of that is on capital—for example, the electric emergency service vehicles and the Callam offices refurbishment, all of which give you a small emissions reduction. I was wondering why more is not being spent on converting the community to undertake larger reductions in emissions.

**Mr Barr:** The Sustainable Household Scheme is a \$150 million program, but it is not all expensed in one fiscal year. We are not interested in creating a mad rush to see really poor behaviour, particularly from fly-by-night operators, some of which I think Ms Castley touched on in her question. We want a long-term, sustainable program that supports households to make a transition. That is where the bulk of new spending is.

Of course, the government itself is an emitter. As part of a long-term program of emission reduction in government-owned assets, we have a program of emission reduction. We have a social cost of carbon, as you may have seen, Mr Braddock, and we are reinvesting funds. We have had schemes across government to reduce our own emissions and we intend to continue those. Now, they are obviously going to be ones that are lumpy, because we have significant capital assets so you are going to see from time to time in an annual budget a significant initiative associated with a specific government asset.

We also have a responsibility in relation to the quality of our government office accommodation. It makes sense, when government is undertaking midlife refurbishment or commissioning new buildings, that you make necessary occupational health and safety improvements and improvements to the workplace. But, at the same time, it is much more efficient to undertake a range of other associated works that reduce the emissions profile of a particular government asset.

**MS CLAY:** Chief Minister, about 60 per cent of our emissions are coming from transport. I am interested in how you have set the balance of your climate action budget, which does not put anything like 60 per cent into the behaviour change that we would need to see to reduce those transport emissions. A lot of it is in capital. I think it is a good spend, but the balance looks odd to me. Can you run us through that sort of rationale?

**Mr Barr:** You are presumably making the assumption that the only spending across government on climate action and emissions reduction occurs within this portfolio stream. I do not think that is a fair assessment. I would point to a range of other investments in other portfolios, or indeed revenue forgone, that would come through consolidated revenue and decisions that have been made in relation to, for example, free registration or reduced registration costs, forgoing stamp duty on zero emission vehicles and the significant investments in Transport Canberra in relation to public transport.

If you look at the totality across government of all spend on emissions reduction, it does focus on households and on transport. Indeed, clearly we have been through a number of other initiatives focused, for example, on our transition to renewable

electricity. Again, it is one budget in isolation; you do need to look at a bigger picture over an extended period of time.

**MS CASTLEY:** The 2020-21 budget established the Office of the Coordinator General for Climate Action. I have some questions around that. Has the office formally been established? Is it under CMTEDD? How many staff have you got devoted to it? Is it delivering projects like the big battery? What policies and legislative, procurement and planning reforms—

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Castley, one question.

**Mr Barr:** There are about eight questions there. Yes, it is established. I am sitting next to the officials. They have introduced themselves so I think that would be reasonably clear. Yes, they are managing a range of projects, including the Sustainable Household Scheme and the Big Canberra Battery. Yes, they are coordinating policy work across government. Yes, they are within CMTEDD as a central agency. I will hand over to Mr Engele to tell you how many staff he has.

**Mr Engele:** The office, within CMTEDD's appropriation, has six staff. It also has project teams that are funded through CMTEDD that are substantive staff of EPSDD. The project director for the Sustainable Household Scheme and the Big Canberra Battery—Mr Lawton here—is in CMTEDD. The project teams for both of those two programs sit within EPSDD, which is where the technical program delivery expertise sits. The teams work jointly together on the delivery of those two projects.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lee.

**MS LEE:** In this year's budget there is \$294,000 devoted to the office, but it is not appropriated for the forward years. Can you provide a bit of detail about the breakdown of that \$294,000 and also why there are no forward appropriations?

**Mr Engele:** That was a rollover from last year. Some of the programs were impacted by COVID in terms of delivery. We have rolled over some of the funding from last financial year into this financial year. The main one is the ACT climate risk assessment work, which is a procurement that we have done with a consulting firm that is running the risk assessment for us. Those funds were moved from the last financial year into this financial year, which is the bulk of that rollover.

**MS LEE:** And in terms of why there is no forward appropriation?

**Mr Engele:** The office was funded for the first 18 months as part of last year's budget. That appropriation is just a technical movement between two financial years.

**MS CLAY:** Chief Minister, yesterday we heard from the transport minister about behaviour change as part of the light rail disruption task force. He told us that there would be some announcements in the coming weeks, and I was pleased to hear it. But I am a bit concerned that we have not set aside enough money overall in the budget to do that behaviour change work that is really quite difficult to do. I see in your budget that you have less than \$1 million to look at climate action-related strategic communications. Is there money in your budget for behaviour change in transport, or

is that purely the remit of the transport minister?

**Mr Barr:** We have existing allocations for communications. New initiatives present an incremental increase on top of a base level of funding for government communications. So you can draw upon your existing resources as well as adding for some specific programs. Yes, there is capacity across whole of government. A lot of that sits clearly within staff within CMTEDD, the communications unit. They are at the moment, and have been for the best part of 18 months, deployed on COVID. We have obviously had a massive government communications effort in relation to COVID—a massively successful one where 95 per cent of Canberrans are very satisfied with the level of information they are receiving in relation to COVID.

We have some excellent communication channels and some outstanding communication professionals who are working for the government. Once we are through the pandemic, there will certainly be capacity across government to refocus our communications efforts. This area that you have identified, together with some other areas of climate change response, will be a key focus. I suspect that is going to pick up pace in 2022. We will still be dealing with COVID-related matters, I suspect, for the rest of this calendar year and possibly early into the new year.

**MS CLAY:** I think you have been doing a really good job on COVID. The results speak for themselves. I certainly understand the need to stagger things. I would appreciate, either on notice or now, some kind of overview of how many FTEs we have working on behaviour change in active transport and public transport to move people out of cars. It is not that clear from looking at the budget papers because it is in so many different portfolios.

**Mr Barr:** We can pull that information together. Obviously, annual reports tend to provide a greater level of detail in relation to those matters, so you will see more of that in the coming months.

**MS CLAY:** That is great. So we can take that on notice?

**Mr Barr:** Yes, we can.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MS LEE:** Can I take us back to the Sustainable Household Scheme? In terms of the loan itself, can you take me through that?

**Mr Barr:** Sorry, the terms of the loan?

**MS LEE:** You talked about the cost of the loan, that it was going to be between two and 15, the average being 10 and eight. What modelling was done to determine that figure in terms of eligibility? When does the term of the loan end and those sorts of things? It is that kind of information broadly.

**Mr Engle:** The \$15,000 captures the cost at the moment of solar panels. A combined solar and battery system fits generally within that envelope, hence the size. I think your question went to what the conditions for consumers are for the loans. When the

consumer engages with Brighte, they are provided the full loan terms. The key elements are that there are no ongoing fees at all. There is just a simple sign-on. There is no cost to sign on and there are no hidden fees. For people that miss a payment, there is a small fee—it is a few dollars—for missed payments after a six-week period.

If someone has missed a payment, it generates a letter and a phone call just to confirm that they are still able and they are not experiencing financial difficulty. There is a small fee charged for that administrative cost. It is in the area of \$4, I think. If we get a report of that, we get information back to the ACT government that people are experiencing hardship so that we can reach out. If there is a reason that they are unable to pay, we can see whether there are arrangements or other supports that need to be put in place. There is no cost. It is a 10-year term and there are monthly repayments.

**MS LEE:** In terms of some of those options, have you had a situation where you have had to undertake further, I suppose, strict measures in terms of debt recovery, or have we not got to that?

**Mr Engle:** There has been no situation. The scheme is relatively new, so we have not seen that at all. We do contemplate that that may happen, that some people's financial situations may change. The assessment that is undertaken by the loan provider is in line with the credit code, so they do need to make sure that people that are signing onto the loan are able to repay it. People's financial situations can dramatically change. If that happens, we are reasonably confident that we will get the information that we need and then be able to put in place other supports if they are warranted.

**MS CASTLEY:** I am just wondering about the average income of the people who are getting the loans. Do you track that, and can you let us know what that is?

**Mr Engle:** We track that because it is personal financial information.

**Mr Barr:** The eligibility criteria for the scheme is outlined. It is not an income-based assessment, but the income assessment obviously is required in terms of the credit check for the individual.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is around the climate adaptation policy. One of the 2021-22 priorities for the Office of the Coordinator General for Climate Action is to undertake a climate adaptation policy analysis to improve Canberra's resilience to the effects of the warming climate. Can I get some further detail on that and what that means?

**Mr Engle:** As I mentioned previously, we have engaged AECOM to undertake a climate risk assessment for the ACT. The focus is on ACT government operations as an initial piece of work. The work itself is, essentially, taking the modelled NARCLiM data, which are the New South Wales and ACT climate projections, which are in the process of being updated, and then modelling them against the known risks. They are looking at different things—the likely hazards that will be exacerbated and the new hazards that arise as a result of the warming climate, and then the resilience of ACT government operations to those risks.

We are undertaking workshops at the moment. That report has not been finalised for government. It is a six-month process that we are going through. It is the first step to understand the ability of the ACT government to both avoid those hazards and then, in extreme situations, respond to them. Avoiding them might relate to things like the stormwater system, understanding what the change in risk profile is going to be and the ability of that system to be able to operate under extreme situations. The emergency response obviously relates to things like bushfire and the capability of the government to respond to those situations.

**THE CHAIR:** What are the expected time frames on that? You said six months until maybe a draft; is that right?

**Mr Engle:** The work will come back for government consideration early next year.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Noting the Chief Minister's comments earlier, I have just checked and the common price range for an e-bike is about \$1,500 to about \$4,000, although it is a little bit more for cargo e-bikes. This is often in excess of the minimum for the loan scheme. They also have far lower embedded emissions as well as being very beneficial for those low income households who might be able to lose the second car and utilise an e-bike. Are these factors being considered as part of that loan scheme?

**Mr Barr:** They are. I think the question here is about additionality, Mr Braddock, as to whether you would, in fact, reduce emissions significantly. We obviously had a line of questioning earlier on in relation to targeting the loan scheme around emission reduction. I know you are very interested in it. I am not ruling it out, but it is just not part of the scheme at the moment. We have got higher priorities.

**MR BRADDOCK:** My supplementary, Chair, would be on the equity argument in terms of particularly those households which cannot afford e-vehicles but could be able to afford an e-bike if they had access to a zero interest loan scheme.

**Mr Barr:** You have quoted prices of \$1,500 to \$4,000. The minimum loan is \$2,000, so the cheaper end of the market. Presumably, they are only going to get cheaper as production increases and will fall below the eligibility for the loan scheme. I do not think it is such an issue at the moment. We have got higher priorities. I do not rule out at some point in the future extending the range of products, but it is just not a priority at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Clay.

**MS CLAY:** I am interested in the additionality work that you are doing, because I think most of us are going off anecdotal behaviour. All of my friends who bought an e-bike have replaced a car and they use it to get to work, but that is not the dataset we should be using for our policy.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed.

**MS CLAY:** Can you tell me how you are getting that dataset on additionality when you are testing—with this policy and with all of them—what to include and what to exclude?

**Mr Barr:** Mr Lawton will assist.

**Mr Lawton:** There are good points about including e-bikes, but we have committed to electric vehicles at the moment. We will do that first and then we will consider e-bikes after that. There is a lot of data we have to look at to make that decision; that decision will come.

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is about the Big Battery. Are you able to provide us with an update on the status of the Big Battery? Has the expression of interest been finalised and, if so, how many submissions were received?

**Mr Barr:** We have completed our market sounding process. I have been briefed on that. I will take a submission to cabinet in due course and we will have some public announcements to follow that.

**MS CASTLEY:** Can you provide a breakdown of the staffing for the project for 2020-21?

**Mr Lawton:** The Big Canberra Battery team has five that are working in EPSDD and they are energy market specialists.

**MS LEE:** Do you have any updates in relation to a projected completion date for that project and the total cost?

**Mr Lawton:** There is \$100 million set aside for the Big Canberra Battery, which is in fact going to be an ecosystem of batteries of different scales. The 250-megawatt target will be largely addressed by the larger scale battery and there has been research done up until now to form a design brief. We are in a position now where we are aiming to go to market towards the end of this year. The procurement will be a two-stage procurement for that large scale battery, so it will probably take about 12 months, and then we will build after that.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, in your first answer you mentioned that you were going to be making a public announcement. I did not catch when that might be happening.

**Mr Barr:** Once cabinet has concluded its deliberations on the matter.

**MS LEE:** Will that be this year?

**Mr Barr:** I will not put a date on that. We will make an announcement once cabinet has concluded its deliberations and we are ready to make an announcement.

**MS CLAY:** Chief Minister, getting off gas is a very strategic target, given that we have got 100 per cent renewables. Can you tell me how much money and how many FTEs there are in the budget for the behaviour change work that will go into getting

people off gas?

**Mr Barr:** We will take that on notice.

**MS LEE:** Chief Minister, I think it was either yesterday or the day before when there was evidence given by Mr Steel for City Services about new gas being connected. Why is there hypocrisy and inconsistency there?

**Mr Barr:** There is not.

**MS LEE:** I go back to the Sustainable Household Scheme. In terms of the breakdown of the different schemes that you mentioned, how do the households come to a decision about that? Is that something that is done in negotiation with people who are doing it or do they come to you and say, "This is what I want"? How does that process work?

**Mr Barr:** In relation to the Sustainable Household Scheme?

**MS LEE:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** As we have heard, those who wish to participate attend an Actsmart workshop so that they can then receive further information and have a better understanding of the mix of products that would be suitable for them.

**MS LEE:** That workshop is a compulsory one for anyone who is looking to get into this?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS CASTLEY:** Going back to a previous question that I asked—I am not asking for the names of the people who have applied for loans—can you give us a bit of an idea, on notice, of the income of the people who are applying for these loans?

**Mr Barr:** We do not keep income data. The eligibility requirements are based on the unimproved land value of a property. The ownership of that property and the unimproved land value are a reasonable proxy for households' income. It is no surprise that, the richer you are, the more expensive the land you live on.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I wanted to ask a question about the Vulnerable Household Energy Support scheme, with the first \$5 million of the \$50 million being allocated. Can you go through the split between owner-occupiers, renters and public housing? How will you protect renters from rent increases as a result of any works undertaken?

**Mr Rutledge:** The vulnerable household scheme has a number of different elements. Currently, we are designing what a residential standard would look like that could, in future, become a regulation for the purpose of renters. Probably the easiest and most effective one would be the insulation standards. That is where we are heading. We are doing some policy thinking around that.

Getting the design of that standard is quite difficult. You would know a lot about

energy efficiency standards. Nationally, most of the standards do not account for the fact that we are 100 per cent renewable. Interestingly, a lot of the star ratings end up pushing you towards gas. When you have 100 per cent renewable electricity you need to develop a new standard that is applicable in Canberra. We have been doing a lot of thinking about that—how we could apply that to dwellings and private renters and how that would also apply to some of our public and social housing dwellings. That is quite a difficult piece of work, but I think we are headed towards an insulation standard. The initial rollout will be to support exactly that, with a focus on social and public housing.

Whilst we are in the public housing dwelling and are doing that, it is really key that you do not just install kit and then not change the way the tenant uses the property. Going to Ms Clay's and other people's interest, there is a behaviour change element so that you are creating an energy efficient home with the people within it using it in an efficient manner.

Dealing with vulnerable households is a pretty time-consuming thing. It means going to the home and spending some time with them to assess the home. It might include an appliance upgrade, it might include a getting-off-gas upgrade and it might include insulation. When we are talking about vulnerable households, certainly window dressings and curtains are something that many vulnerable Canberrans do not have access to. We are looking at all of those elements with a big focus on vulnerable households, which are private renters, low income renters and those in public housing dwellings.

We have also made available a renters' guide, and I would point you to the EPSDD website for that. The renters' guide helps renters, when they are selecting a property, to look for some of these things. In a tight market, you need to make your assessments very quickly, so it points to what to look for when securing a new rental property. Again, it provides some checklists and tips about how to use that property once you are in there. Again, simple things, particularly around window dressings and draught excluders, can make a big difference. Choice of appliances is the next one after that. That is where that is focused at this stage.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Braddock.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Has any consideration been given to portable heat pumps for renters so they can actually take that from property to property rather than basically creating a capital improvement for the landlord?

**Mr Rutledge:** Working through the split incentives is really difficult. Heat pumps are normally an expensive bit of kit. We will consider it in the mix, but I am not sure that we have landed on that solution at this stage.

**MS LEE:** ACTCOSS have expressed concern that this year's budget allocates less than half of what was promised for the forward years in previous budgets for the Vulnerable Household Energy Support scheme. How do you respond to that and how do you appease the concerns that have been raised by ACTCOSS?

**Mr McGlynn:** I am not sure what the basis for that claim is. The program was

designed as a \$50 million program. It is still a \$50 million program. As Mr Rutledge was explaining, we want to make sure that that program aligns very well with the introduction of minimum energy requirements for rental properties so that it is able to support the introduction of that scheme in an integrated sort of way. Basically, until that work is finished and complete, it is very difficult to fully design that program. We are basically trying to line up those timings. We have not reduced the program. We are simply trying to integrate the timing and the integration between those different programs.

**MS CLAY:** I am really pleased to hear about the work going on with the insulation. I have seen a number of analyses done in other countries where insulation is getting about your cheapest climate reduction per tonne. Has your agency done any analysis on what you are spending in different areas and whether you are getting the best buy per tonne of emissions reduction?

**Mr Rutledge:** We are working through exactly that. That is why I said we are heading towards insulation, because everything that we have looked at in local conditions for Canberrans is insulation first, then window dressings and then appliances. We needed to apply the Canberra settings, which are our climate and our housing stock. We are finding that it is lining up towards that. We have not finalised that, as I said to Mr Braddock, but that is where I think we are headed.

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is about the scheme for free registration: \$675,000 has been allocated for zero emissions vehicles. Can you give me a breakdown by suburb of how many Canberrans have received free rego?

**Mr Barr:** We would not have a suburb breakdown, but we can provide information on the number of vehicles that have received the reduction in registration.

**MS CASTLEY:** You are taking that on notice?

**Mr Barr:** The number, yes. We may be able to provide that now.

**Mr Rutledge:** As at May this year, there were 975 EVs registered. As at October 21, there were 1,304. So that is an increase of 329 that have come in with free registration.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, you mentioned that it was the free registration reduction, but the title of the scheme is “free registration for zero net emissions vehicles”. I am wondering how satisfied people are with the scheme when they realise they have to pay the other components, that it is not free rego as a whole. They have got to pony up the cash for plates and all of the extra stuff.

**Mr Barr:** The registration component is part of the total charge. You still need to have compulsory third-party insurance. If you are changing your plates or if you are having special plates then you do need to pay for those.

**MS CASTLEY:** Or if they are brand new for a Tesla, for instance. I know most people do not realise that that is not included in the scheme. It is not advertised very well. Has there been negative feedback or are people happy?

**Mr Barr:** We are not aware of that being a major issue.

**MS CLAY:** Chief Minister, I was pleased to hear that there is some whole-of-government work planned or underway to look at embedded emissions in light of some work that is being done on that. Can you tell me how many FTEs there are and how much money is allocated to do that whole-of-government coordination on the new work going forward on embedded emissions?

**Mr Barr:** That will be across agencies. It will involve people in this room. The exact number of FTEs will vary depending on particular pieces of work that are commissioned. You can certainly take from the answers previously around the available staffing that we have that that would be the ballpark amount, plus any external work that we commission.

**MS CLAY:** That might be something that we would need to drill down on in the next budget when that work is further progressed?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. I think we report on some of this more fulsomely in annual reports, as opposed to a specific new initiative within the budget, because there is the existing resource. The existing appropriation and existing staffing across agencies, of course, can be directed to particular priority tasks in any given year—permanent full-time employees—but the particular issues they are working on obviously change from week to week, month to month and year to year.

**THE CHAIR:** Chief Minister, can you outline some of the embedded emissions work that is going on at the moment?

**Mr Barr:** Sure. Gene will help.

**Mr McGlynn:** I am still thinking about your question about the FTEs. Often embedded emissions are rolled into other work. When we do programs, we talk to households about the whole range of things that they do—what appliances do they pick, how do they manage them and how do they choose products that are environmentally sustainable as well. They have different implications, in that embedded emissions tend to be things that do not happen within the ACT. They do not tend to make those savings for the households themselves. Often we speak to them about those things in different ways. I do not think we have a large number of people who are looking directly at embedded emissions as the sole aspect of their work, but they tend to look at that across the range of things that they do.

In doing that, we also look at end-of-life issues. One of the things we are looking at is how to recycle things like PV systems as they reach the end of their life. We are looking at making sure that the ACT has systems for those as well because, at the moment, they tend to be things that are available outside. We are at a fairly early stage for that sort of stuff. We will need to do the same sorts of things for some of the new technologies that are emerging.

**Short suspension.**

Appearances:

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

Lewis, Dr Sophie, Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment

Grimes, Mr Sean, Director, Sustainability, Environmental Assessments and Reporting

Farrelly, Ms Serena, Assistant Director

**THE CHAIR:** Hello, everyone. We will now begin the third and final session today for the hearings of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity. We are today going to hear from the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome and thank Dr Sophie Lewis and officials for appearing today.

Firstly, there are a few housekeeping matters to draw your attention to. 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.” This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice in the transcript. I understand that you had been forwarded a copy of the privilege statement. Could each of you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, that is correct; I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

**Mr Grimes:** Yes. I have read and acknowledge the statement.

**Ms Farrelly:** I have read and acknowledge the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We will not invite opening statements, so we will just begin with questions. I am looking at the budget documents. Dr Lewis, it mentioned minister-initiated investigations. Can you outline what they are and what has been undertaken over the last year?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, gladly. Thank you, Dr Paterson. We currently have two minister directed investigations that sit with our office. The first was directed by Minister Rattenbury when he was our administering minister last August, and that was to undertake an investigation into scope 3 emissions for the ACT and to recommend opportunities for reducing our scope 3 emissions. That investigation involved two consultancies that we procured to assist with the technical aspects of that report and the methodology around calculating and developing greenhouse gas budgets. That report has been written and was delivered to Minister Vassarotti, our current administering minister, late last month. We understand that that will be tabled in November. So that is about scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions for the ACT.

The second minister directed investigation was directed by Minister Vassarotti in early March of 2021, and that is to look at the state of the lakes and waterways in the ACT. That is due for delivery in the first quarter of next year. That also has two contracts that we have procured to undertake some of the more technical aspects of that work. One is with the University of Canberra and the other is a policy review

with Alluvium.

**THE CHAIR:** How long does the average minister-initiated investigation take?

**Dr Lewis:** When the investigation is directed to our office, it includes a timeframe and a deadline for delivery. The scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions report was delivered on time. We are hoping that the report on the state of the lakes and waterways will also be delivered on time, but we may incur a brief delay due to the previous two months of hardships that have been encountered due to COVID lockdowns. We are yet to determine whether we can deliver that on time, but we are quite hopeful that if a delay results from that, it will only be minor.

For both of those, a period of approximately 12 months was provided to the office. The period of time that is afforded to my office to undertake those minister-directed investigations really depends on the scope and terms of reference that are included in that direction. Off the top of my head, I would say 12 months is fairly typical, but I believe some may have, in the past, been provided with further time, particularly in the instances where data has to be collected at particular times of the year to assess the ecology of an environment, where there is other seasonally-dependent information or where on-ground information has to be attained. All of those affect the timeframe that might be required to undertake an investigation.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you believe that your office is resourced adequately to undertake these investigations?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes. We have not had an issue in delivering the scope 3 emissions investigation. We have requested assistance from EPSDD to fund some of the aspects of our investigation into the state of the lakes and waterways, and that is under discussion based on the budget for the office throughout this financial year. But we have not had an issue meeting those directions with the resources in the office so far.

**THE CHAIR:** Great. Mr Braddock, a substantive?

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes. Just in March this year, you spoke about a need for increased investment in air-quality monitoring and you also said that the ACT government should undertake an assessment of air pollutant emissions to update the national air pollutant inventory data. Can you give us any update on work in this space—whether you have been supporting or advocating for better quality monitoring and reporting in the ACT?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes. In March, we discussed some of the recommendations in the 2019 State of the Environment Report, particularly in relation to air quality in the ACT, and some of those recommendations included an increase in the number of air quality monitoring stations and an update to the inventory, which was a recommendation that was not accepted by government. Since that time, we have continued those discussions, including discussions with EPSDD and the EPA and also providing some contributions to the government air quality strategy. But we have not undertaken any formal work program around air quality.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Yes, thank you.

**MS CASTLEY:** In the *ACT State of the Environment Report 2019*, you made several recommendations to the Assembly, one of which was that a funding model be established for biodiversity, environmental protection, and water management, and I think they have allocated \$150,000. Is this enough and do you think that the government has allocated enough in their budget for your office?

**Dr Lewis:** Sorry, Ms Castley, can you just confirm if they were two separate questions? Was there one about whether our office was sufficiently funded and another regarding a monitoring—

**MS CASTLEY:** It was about the recommendations. In your report, you made recommendations, and specifically about \$150,000 with regard to biodiversity. Is that a good enough allocation in consideration of your recommendations?

**Dr Lewis:** In terms of whether our office is sufficiently resourced to undertake our legislated functions, it is my opinion that the team that I oversee and the revenue that we receive is sufficient to undertake that, and I am very proud of the work that we deliver and the value of that work. In terms of the recommendations in the *State of the Environment Report* and funding allocated to meet that, I will ask for Sean Grimes to jump in here. Sean is director of assessments and reporting.

**Mr Grimes:** Yes, that is a great question. I will have to take that one on notice. I will have to look at the recommendations in a bit more detail and look at the funding that has been provided for those. I do not think I have enough information here to answer that at the moment.

**MS CASTLEY:** Thank you. Just to confirm: you are taking that question on notice. I have a supplementary question. One of the recommendations was to hasten the electrification of the bus fleet. Given that the budget allocates almost \$20 million for new electric buses, is this a wise use of funds? Can you talk to me about your thoughts on that?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, we will again take that question on notice. The annual report for the office requires an update of each directorate on all open recommendations from the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. That includes all directed investigations and the *State of the Environment Report*. This year's annual report is the first time that we are requesting an update and response from directorates on delivery of programs to meet the recommendations of the 2019 *State of the Environment Report*. We will take a look at that and see what has been supplied to us by directorates and then provide some evaluation of whether we think that that is sufficient.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Dr Lewis, regarding complaint generated investigations, can you provide some detail on what sort of complaints you are receiving.

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, that is no problem at all. The office does not tend to receive a large number of investigations. Our legislation around complaints limits what complaints are received by the office. They tend to be regarding the management of the environment here in the ACT rather than direct reports that go to the EPA. We do not

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receive a large number of complaints, but the ones that we do receive can be fairly complex in terms of the relationships between different entities and government agencies.

Since March, we have been working on resolving one complaint that was raised with our office regarding wood heater smoke. This was received in late December directly from the complainant, a member of the community, and over that period of time we have been obtaining information from various agencies and directorates, discussing it with the complainant directly and then identifying opportunities for woodsmoke complaints in the ACT. That has taken some nearly 10 months to resolve in terms of delivery of a final report to the complainant and the agencies involved. That is the only complaint that we have been actively handling during this period.

**THE CHAIR:** We had the minister here talking about the EPA this morning. Can you outline how closely, or not, your office works with the EPA?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes. We work quite closely with the EPA. I have a regular monthly or two-monthly meeting directly with the EPA and we have also met frequently throughout this period to work collaboratively towards identifying issues with the way that this wood heater report was managed and ideally to find mutual improvements. So I would say we have a close working relationship.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Braddock, a substantive question?

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is in terms of whether the legislation and the policy settings around your role are appropriate. Would your role be better served with additional legislative clarity, changes or functions?

**Dr Lewis:** I am sorry, Mr Braddock, I do not think it would be necessarily appropriate for me to provide my opinion on that. Whether the commissioner's legislation and role is sufficient, I think would be more appropriately addressed by some sort of independent body or review.

I will say that in addressing this complaint and various other undertakings in our work program throughout the year, we have found that our legislation can be hard to understand and follow. Particularly, we have identified that there are some contradictions or ambiguities in language on major projects, such as the State of the Environment Report, which are not clearly stipulated in there. They are small or potentially small things that we have noticed while undertaking our work. But as to how the commissioner fits within the broader environmental governance of the territory, I do not think it is appropriate for me to make comment on that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**MS CASTLEY:** I just want to go back to the beginning of this session, where we were discussing scope 3 emissions. If I remember correctly and heard you correctly, you are writing a report on scope 3 emissions and how they are being measured. Mr Rattenbury told the Assembly that there is no recognised measure of scope 3 emissions, so can you explain to me what it is that you are doing? Is Mr Rattenbury incorrect? What are you doing with scope 3 and is he right or wrong?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, sure. Minister Rattenbury is not incorrect in stating that. The direction from Minister Rattenbury first requested that we determine and outline a methodology for developing accounts for the scope 3 emissions for the ACT. When nations come together and make pledges for emissions reductions in terms of their greenhouse gas emissions—and that is what we are hearing in the news at the moment; it is very topical ahead of COP26 in Glasgow and discussions around the national targets—they include only scope 1 and scope 2 emissions.

That is the same across all jurisdictions; that is international. We have standardised, consistent ways of reporting and measuring scope 1 and scope 2 emissions. When parties come together to pledge their contributions for emissions reductions, as I said, that includes only scope 1 and scope 2 emissions. We do not have a consistent approach globally for measuring and accounting for scope 3 emissions. So Minister Rattenbury is quite correct there, but we have been tasked with presenting a methodology for reporting on scope 3 emissions, and that is a large part of the report that we have just presented to Minister Vassarotti.

**MS CASTLEY:** So you are global leaders in reporting on scope 3?

**Dr Lewis:** I would not say we are; I would say the ACT is. In directing our office to undertake this, we are doing something that we believe no other jurisdiction has done in measuring and identifying sources of scope 3 emissions for the territory.

**MS CASTLEY:** Will this reporting on the scope 3 encompass everything? Does it grab the emissions from office buildings, light rail and all of that and sort of inform the social cost of carbon? Is it all going to roll into one?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, you are quite correct that it includes major infrastructure and the other examples you gave. That is precisely what scope 3 emissions are. Scope 1 and scope 2 emissions relate to greenhouse gas emissions from activities within the ACT. That includes things like hopping in your car and driving to the IGA. Scope 2 emissions are grid-supplied energy—the emissions that relate to turning on your light switch, although in the ACT we are now entirely renewable, so since 2020, scope 2 emissions are zero.

Scope 3 emissions result from activities occurring outside the ACT because of activities within the ACT. That includes the purchase of goods and services and all the energy and greenhouse gas emissions that go into that—everything from the mining, the manufacturing, the warehousing and the storage, to the transport. So all those major projects, all those examples you gave, relate to scope 3. As to whether that is related to the social cost of carbon—not inherently, I would say.

**MR BRADDOCK:** We just had a very topical debate in the previous session about the embedded emissions in the electric vehicle versus the electric bike. Would scope 3 emissions allow the differentiation between those two choices and then allow the guidance as to which one is the better choice, emissions wise, to go with?

**Dr Lewis:** Not necessarily, Mr Braddock. Accounting for the scope 3 emissions would provide us an additional set of information for evaluating those two options, so

we could get a more complete picture. And you could do the same for housing, for example. So you could look at one house and say that that is significantly better from a climate change perspective, because the operational energy requirements of that home are very low. But when we include scope 3, we are providing a much more comprehensive picture. So it is not just the energy that is required to operate it; it is the total cost of energy, including the energy required to build that. So if we include scope 3, we start to be able to evaluate with a more complete picture of the data and the information going into that.

**THE CHAIR:** My supplementary question is around the new technology in terms of the methodology of assessing scope 3. We are constantly evolving with new technologies. Is that built into the evaluation system? Any new product that comes on the market would then be calculated within that to have a sort of scope 3 indicator?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes. I cannot talk to the report with too many specifics, because it has not yet been tabled and it is not a publicly available document, but in terms of scope 3 calculations, we have used a methodology that has been developed by the University of New South Wales, through peer reviewed literature. They undertook the accounts for us. The scope 3 emissions apply whenever there is a financial transaction. So whenever there is a transaction of money, regardless of what that product is for, there is a greenhouse gas emission tied to that.

If you have any more specific questions around that methodology that we have used in our report, I will throw to Serena Farrelly, because she is the one who led that and has a much deeper knowledge of the model and methodology and technical aspects of that.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Farrelly, do you have anything to contribute?

**Ms Farrelly:** Thanks, Dr Paterson. I would just like to add that one part of the report was to look at targets for reduction for particular areas within the ACT, looking at product groups, which are determined by, as Dr Lewis mentioned, the financial data for ACT and what we spend money on. Part of looking at those targets for reduction—while they are quite uncertain because we are looking 20, 30, 40, 50 years into future—was that those targets were based, as far as we can predict at this stage on new emerging technologies and changes in our emissions in other states and moving towards renewable energy and that sort of thing as well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Just going back to the work you have been doing for Minister Vassarotti on waterways, and I am wondering about some of the preliminary findings you might have found as you have gone through that.

**Dr Lewis:** Again, I would not like to pre-empt any of the findings, because we are awaiting the data report from University of Canberra. But perhaps I can get Sean to again contribute, having investigated aspects of water quality and management in the ACT for the State of the Environment Report, and what might have come out of that.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**Mr Grimes:** In terms of the main impacts on the lakes and waterways, the

information we are getting is pretty much what has been around for a while. There is a lot of impact from urban runoff and a lot of impact from development areas for sediment and other pollutants. We are also looking at leaves and things that run off into lakes, causing algal blooms. So there is nothing new that we are aware of. But the report will be far more comprehensive in terms of looking at all of that together and looking at policy and other things that we could change to improve waterways.

**MS CASTLEY:** I have a supplementary question on the healthy waterways project. I am interested in how much more money you needed. If you had to ask for more cash wouldn't this go to saying that you guys are not funded adequately?

**Dr Lewis:** Sorry, I will clarify by confirming that we are not undertaking delivery of the healthy waterways project. That is a separate project. This is the investigation into the state of the ACT lakes and waterways. We do not have any budget issues in terms of delivering of that report. It is fairly typical of the working relationship between the office, the minister and the directorate that we are directed to undertake an investigation, and then we liaise with the directorate and/or the minister regarding whether we can meet the cost of that report internally or whether we require assistance. So we have no concerns that we will be able to deliver that report to the minister given those arrangements.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We are just about out of time, but Ms Castley, do you have a substantive question?

**MS CASTLEY:** I do. In the budget, your allocation was around \$1.5 million or somewhere along those lines. Can you just give us a quick breakdown on how this money gets spent?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes. Our revenue for this financial year is slightly higher because we are further towards the four-year work cycle of the next State of the Environment Report, and we will have some costs associated with that. Approximately half of that revenue is directed towards staffing. Then we have significant outlays for things like rent, IT needs, and support that we get from the directorate. In terms of our projects, some of that will be spent on these minister-directed investigations that I have discussed and some towards the State of the Environment Report in the lead-up to 2023. Then we have other intentions of working on things like the Ngunnawal state of the environment indicators and seasonal calendar, as well as the delivery of a web report on environmental volunteering in the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** We might wrap up the hearing now. So on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you, Dr Lewis, Mr Grimes and Ms Farrelly, for your attendance. You will be sent a draft of the *Hansard* transcript for correction of minor errors. If you took any questions on notice could you please provide answers to the committee secretary within five working days. Today's committee hearings are now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 11.29 am.**