



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER
AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2020-2021](#))

Members:

**MS L CASTLEY (Chair)
MS S ORR (Deputy Chair)
MR J DAVIS**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2022

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr L Kerr (Ph: 620 50136)**

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	85, 120, 163
Cultural Facilities Corporation	120

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.18 am.

Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Balaretnaraja, Mr Ash, Executive Branch Manager for Business and Innovation

Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Acting Executive Group Manager, Policy and Strategy, Economic Development

Priest, Ms Jenny, Acting Executive Group Manager, Business Support Grants, Economic Development

Triffitt, Mr Ross, Executive Branch Manager, Events ACT, Economic Development

THE CHAIR: Good morning. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality for annual reports 2020-21. Before we begin, on behalf of the committee, I would like to acknowledge that we meet today on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Be aware that proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, could witnesses please say clearly, “I will take that on notice,” so that the committee and witnesses are able to note this for the transcript.

Our first session today is with the Chief Minister, in his capacity as Minister for Tourism, and we have officials from CMTEDD as well. I remind all witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Before you speak, can you please confirm that you understand the implications of the privilege statement.

There are no opening statements this morning, so I will kick off with the first question. Chief Minister, I want to chat with you about the 2020 action plan for recovery. There were 32 action items in that recovery plan. I would like to know the detail about which individual actions have been completed so far, and if you could update the committee on the progress of the actions that have not yet been completed?

Mr Barr: It has been a busy period for tourism recovery. There have been, since that plan was prepared, further waves and new variants of COVID, so there have been, obviously, external factors that have impacted, but the vast majority of initiatives, programs and projects within that recovery plan have commenced. I will invite officials in the room to talk through the details.

Mr Kobus: Thank you, Chief Minister. I understand the privileges statement. The action plan for recovery that we released late in 2020 had four broad areas. Those are broken into: restoring major access routes, offering quality events and experiences,

growing spend and visitation, and supporting Canberra businesses.

As the Chief Minister described, under each of those four pillars the majority of actions against each of those items have commenced. In particular, for obvious reasons, over that period we were focused a lot on initiatives that supported the tourism businesses affected through the impacts of COVID-19. The initiatives that we implemented across each of those four pillars supported the industry through the challenges of the last two years, which is the primary reason why we set up that action plan for recovery.

Probably the most significant thing that we have done over that period is the financial support for businesses. There have been a range of initiatives put in place to support those businesses that rely on interstate and international visitation. In addition to that, we did a whole range of initiatives, during the periods when we could, to drive demand, because there is probably no better way to help businesses to recover than actually getting trade happening normally.

Aside from the business support grants, which provided \$75 million, approximately, to tourism businesses in the ACT, we invested more than \$400,000 in small tourism operator COVID recovery payments—that was quite early on in the piece—to support those businesses immediately affected by the first phases of lockdowns. We had a \$2.5 million investment in accommodation and tourism venue operator support, which was broken down into full rebates on fixed water and sewerage charges; we waived hire car and bus fee registration fees for tour operators; and we also invested over \$10 million for tourism and events and the hospitality sector through the Small Business Hardship Scheme.

As I said, one of the primary mechanisms that we had at our disposal to support businesses was driving demand through the fields where we were able to do that. We have now run two successful programs of the tourism and cooperative marketing fund, so two lots of \$500,000 grants have been fully allocated to the tourism industry, and we have run one round of the COVID-safe co-investment program, which saw \$750,000 co-invested with the tourism industry as well. We also ran a range of industry support mechanisms through what we called our Tourism Reboot program, which provided operators with the skills and resources they needed to manage over this last period.

Another major substantive thing that we did over the period was continue to make it easier and cheaper for visitors to get to Canberra. A key part of that is working closely with Canberra Airport and airlines to ensure that we are well connected to not only capital cities but more parts of regional Australia. Across that period we did have some wide-ranging success, most notably securing the services of Jetstar for the first time, five days a week between Canberra and Brisbane, but also a number of regional routes connecting Canberra to Newcastle, to Ballina, to the Sunshine Coast and, for the first time in many years, Canberra to Hobart on both Link and Qantas.

The key for us, moving forward now, is to consolidate that range of supports and, looking forward through a period of fewer restrictions, to put in place a range of mechanisms, probably still largely under those four key pillars—they are the foundation of the way we operate—to ensure that we do the things that drive

visitation through a period of more normal economic activity.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Can you just outline which actions we have not quite got to yet?

Mr Kobus: There are a number of actions on that list. To save time in this hearing, I am happy to take that on notice and provide a list, but I think the majority of those actions either have been completed or have at least commenced.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you so much. Let's move on.

MS ORR: Minister, with that action plan and with the bits that we are putting in place, obviously we are expecting the recovery from COVID to be ongoing over a number of years. What are you looking to next in terms of how to best support the sector and to continue to see that recovery progress?

Mr Barr: As part of work that we are undertaking with the other states and territories and Tourism Australia, there is a broader tourism industry 2030 plan being developed, so the ACT will contribute to that. I imagine that it will be a similar process to the tourism 2020 plan that was developed in the last decade to guide the industry's economic development over the ten years to 2020. So we will be participating in that.

Within the local context, I would anticipate that we will have our own 2030 targets and plan that will be influenced and impacted by the national discussions but will have their own local focus. Within that, I would anticipate two action plans. There is a 2023 to 2026 time frame and then 2027 to 2030. That work will occur this calendar year to outline the tourism industry development plans for the rest of this decade.

MS ORR: Am I right in my understanding that a large part of that national focus will be on getting the opportunities from the reopened border and how that can start to work to support the recovery?

Mr Barr: That is certainly a very significant factor. Within the division of responsibilities between the states and territories and the commonwealth, Tourism Australia has the principal responsibility for marketing Australia overseas, but it also undertakes more direct partnerships with state and territory tourism bodies around marketing different regions or experiences within Australia as part of the themed approach to marketing Australia into different international markets.

Clearly, a factor that is impacting on the short-term marketing focus for Tourism Australia is that not every international market is open to Australia or indeed is allowing its own citizens to travel. Australia's biggest inbound market, China, obviously has a different set of COVID arrangements in terms of travel than Australia does. Up until very recently, our second biggest international market, New Zealand, also had closed borders. So the initial phases of Tourism Australia's focus and the work that we will do with them in an international context have necessarily focused on markets that would be open to travel and able to travel to Australia.

In the medium term, it would be anticipated that travel would free up amongst our larger markets. This will present opportunities for the ACT, in partnership with

tourism industry partners and Tourism Australia, to look at some of those established tourism markets, as well as, I guess, a potential reshaping of Australia's key tourism markets, based on a changed aviation environment and some pretty significant geopolitical changes that have transpired over the last few years.

If I was to summarise the opportunity, it really is in diversification, but for a jurisdiction of our size we cannot be in every international market, so we need to focus on markets that are most likely to deliver a return on investment for us. That is, of course, a combination of the volume of travel, together with the spend of the travellers. We have tended to, historically, for very good reason, focus on maximising the economic impact of tourism—going after high-yielding markets rather than higher volume markets—but volume does also drive total economic contributions, so it is a balancing act.

It will be aligned with our aviation strategy, because, clearly, if you can fly direct into the ACT that makes it a significantly easier tourism sell than if you have to get here via another city. Australia will always suffer the tyranny of distance; it is a long haul destination for most international markets, with the exception of New Zealand, which is why New Zealand, even though it is a relatively small country, was our number one tourism market nationally for quite some time and was only recently overtaken by China in terms of volume of tourists. They are some of the factors that we will be considering both in the medium term and for the balance of this decade.

MS ORR: Obviously, the international borders reopening and the work that will be going on to recover the international tourism market will be an ongoing effort. Where do you see domestic tourism sitting in those recoveries and in the ACT strategies?

Mr Barr: In the short term there is still quite a reluctance for people to travel. The sentiment surveys are showing a great deal of wariness, particularly about long haul travel. I think we will be well positioned in the next 12 months to focus on our key short distance drive and the Canberra plus two-hour aviation market. The opportunities there are really to drive increased frequency and the number of seats coming into Canberra Airport on existing domestic routes via low-cost carrier. The arrival of Jetstar is a very significant shift for our market, as well as the entry of Rex into the market, providing midpoint competition and more aggressive pricing that has driven the full cost carriers into a more competitive market offering. Plus, of course, we have access to the largest drive market in Australia, three hours away in Sydney. They are the areas of focus.

Whilst there remains a degree of hesitancy for Australians to travel overseas and a limited number of countries that they can travel to without a range of COVID restrictions or limitations, the domestic market looks to be the best opportunity for growth in the next 12 months. Beyond that, there will be a lot of pent-up demand for Australians to travel overseas, so that domestic share of tourism spend will start to shift a little more to Australians travelling overseas in calendar year 2023 and beyond.

That is why I think there also may be an interest in some of our major inbound tourist markets to be travelling to Australia again, because there will be a number of people who have not been here for years who will be wanting to come or people who have never been here at all who make the decision that it is time to travel to Australia. So

I see international as a medium-term prospect and domestic as the immediate short-term.

MS ORR: Yes.

MS LEE: There was an aspirational goal of \$2.5 billion domestic visitor economy by June 2022. Acknowledging, of course, the Omicron wave, has that been revised and, if so, what is the new goal and time line?

Mr Barr: I think the original target was 2.5 by 2020 and that was achieved. COVID then impacted, so it will be quite some time before we get back to that level. What that target should be is impacted by what the Australian target will be and our share of that, so that is something that will be considered in our thinking about what a 2030 target would be.

MS LEE: Thank you.

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MS ORR: I just want to get an idea, Chief Minister, on what you are doing as part of the tourism recovery to make people comfortable about travelling in a COVID-safe way, to overcome that obstacle and that hesitation of people still not wanting to travel?

Mr Barr: Yes. It is clear that the drive market and people being able to travel by driving to Canberra within their family unit or otherwise certainly has been a preferred method of domestic travel in recent times, but we have been working with other states and territories and the aviation industry on necessary COVID-safe protocols for domestic aviation. That is why there are still mask mandates associated with airports and domestic aviation. I imagine that will remain for the foreseeable future.

We are also looking to work with other transport providers, land transport providers, to ensure that we have both frequency and COVID-safe plans associated with their services. Obviously, driving yourself and flying are the main ways that people come into the ACT, but rail and passenger bus services are also a part of our tourism market. It is about ensuring that there are appropriate protocols. This, necessarily, has to be cross-border and so requires jurisdictions to work together to ensure that there are COVID-safe protocols in place for that sort of land transport. That work occurs within the health ministers' forum, in national cabinet and amongst tourism ministers.

MS ORR: Great; thank you.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, I am interested in all of the reporting that we have seen today about the possibility of investing \$2.5 million in a tent that can apparently seat up to 10,000 people that might help with our indoor venue situation. My first reaction is: what is wrong with the AIS? Can you please give us an update on where the negotiations are at with the federal government about the best use of that facility?

Mr Barr: Sure. The commonwealth made a unilateral decision to close the arena. They did so without any consultation with the ACT government or any of the regular

users of the venue. We have expressed our disappointment—

MR DAVIS: I think you are on mute, Chief Minister.

THE CHAIR: We have lost you, Chief Minister.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, can you hear us? We can't hear you.

THE CHAIR: Move, possibly? I think the internet might be frozen.

MR DAVIS: No; I can see that he is talking.

Mr Barr: has been supporting and—

MR DAVIS: Sorry, Chief Minister, you have just come back, but for a little while we could not hear you, so we missed everything after “unilaterally”.

Mr Barr: Right. Okay. Sorry. I will start again.

MR DAVIS: That is all right. Thank you. Sorry.

Mr Barr: The commonwealth made a unilateral decision to close the venue. They did so without any consultation with any of the user groups or the territory government. We expressed our disappointment at that decision and sought its reversal—and have done so repeatedly.

We made some progress in relation to reopening the facility for its use as a mass vaccination hub, so that does give some hope that, potentially, with a change of federal government in a couple of months, the door is open to being able to see the commonwealth make, in the context of their budget and given that it is their asset, relatively modest investments to be able to restore the arena for its original purpose, those being sporting events and live entertainment and the like.

I have written again—I think it would be letter number three or four—to the current federal sports minister, seeking from the commonwealth a commitment to reopening the arena for its original purpose. Clearly, this should be an issue locally in the federal election that is coming in the next few months, so I will make a public call now for all candidates who seek office in the ACT to state a position in relation to the commonwealth restoring that facility for the people of Canberra. I hope that we can get all candidates and all political parties locally committed to that call and that the commonwealth will make that investment in the asset that they own.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, I am not usually in the business of defending the federal government, but I cannot imagine that a perfectly good facility was closed with no reason. What do you understand the reason to be as to why the facility was closed for indoor sport and live entertainment?

Mr Barr: I understand that it relates to a failure of the commonwealth to maintain the facility and a suggestion that, without investment in some elements of the venue, it would not meet appropriate safety protocols to hold a crowd of 4½ to five thousand

people. I understand that there are some issues related to fire safety, event safety, those sorts of things, and a list of items that would be considered routine maintenance for a facility that is 40 years old.

MR DAVIS: Has an offer been made by the federal government to the ACT government to purchase the facility?

Mr Barr: No, not that I am aware of. If we were to purchase it we would be taking on a liability. If we were the asset owner, we would then be required to pay for the maintenance and upkeep and restoration of the asset. This does feed into a broader question. The arena is the Australian Institute of Sport arena, the AIS. It is a commonwealth facility and the future of the venue largely hinges on the commonwealth making a decision about the Institute of Sport and what level of facilities there will be there.

MR DAVIS: Could I take it from your answer, then, Chief Minister, that it would be your preference for the facility to remain commonwealth owned and commonwealth managed and that the ACT government does not have an appetite to purchase the facility?

Mr Barr: Well, we are not buying it today. If we were to acquire the asset, it would need to be part of a broader set of arrangements for that precinct. It would need to include the stadium and all of the available land around it, in order to sell that for redevelopment to finance the redevelopment of the arena and the stadium. That is the only path forward. That could be done in partnership with the commonwealth. That is my preference. That is the view that has been put to the commonwealth multiple times. But I feel it will require a change of government. I am confident that there will be a change of government in two months time, so that will allow this issue to progress.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, have you had a commitment from the federal Labor leader about the reopening of the AIS?

Mr Barr: No. I am calling for that commitment now.

MS ORR: I would like to talk about events in the ACT. We are seeing the Enlighten festival return, so I just wanted to get an update on what other things we can expect to see coming back to the ACT and also get an update on how Enlighten is going.

Mr Barr: Thank you. Yes, we are focused on delivery of Enlighten and Floriade this year. They are the two major events that the territory government will be running. Going into 2023, there will be the return of a number of other major events that the territory has run, COVID willing. For an update on Enlighten, which kicks off on Friday, I will invite officials in the room to talk you through that.

Mr Triffitt: Thank you, Chief Minister. I have read and understand the privilege statement. The Enlighten festival kicks off tomorrow, 4 March, and goes through to 20 March. It features the Enlighten illuminations in the national triangle, commencing from Friday through to Canberra Day; Lights, Canberra, Action; the Canberra Balloon Spectacular; Symphony in the Park; and Canberra Day, which all sit within the community events portfolio, but it also has a number of additional events, including

Van Gogh Alive, the Night Noodle Markets and The Forge, that occur over the three-week period. It is great to see the return of events. The events have been in market since 7 February. We have had quite a strong response and we are looking forward to good attendance over the three weeks.

MS ORR: With the attendance, what does “good” mean? Can we elaborate on what that means?

Mr Triffitt: Yes. The highest attendance we have had was back in 2019, in pre-COVID conditions, where there was an estimate of over 300,000 people attending over the period of the festival. Obviously, with the current conditions and a return of events, we are anticipating that numbers will be lower. Certainly, last year’s event was hampered by a number of conditions placed on it in relation to capacity limits and ticketing, which saw that the numbers were lower than previous years.

This year we hope to see a return. Obviously, the event this year is not ticketed, so at this point, until the events are running, we do not have any information about what the attendance is likely to be. Obviously, there are concerns around weather, but there certainly seems to be an appetite for the return of the events in relation to the responses we have had on our social channels and other mechanisms for advertising the events.

MS ORR: And the bubble things that we are seeing pop up all over the city, are they part of Enlighten?

Mr Triffitt: Yes. There are a number of collaborations that are occurring with the main festival. The city illuminations are being delivered by the CRA. We have the bubbles or Ephemeral, as they are called. There is also a statute in Garema Place, and there are a number of installations that are occurring in the Canberra Centre which are all partnerships with the event. In addition to that, we have a free shuttle bus that is operating between the city and the National Triangle and the major events that are occurring in the Enlighten precinct.

MS ORR: Having these events in unison with Enlighten is something that is newer, isn’t it? I can’t recall other times when this has happened.

Mr Triffitt: Yes, there is certainly an effort to expand the precinct beyond the national triangle, to move people into other areas of the city. This has been a consistent effort from Events ACT in relation to Floriade and the Floriade community, and something that we are doing with Enlighten as well.

There are also a number of ticketed events where we have invited other national attractions or other tourist entities to deliver events that are ticketed and paid, as part of the festival, that are promoted through our platforms. That includes things at the Botanic Gardens and the Canberra Theatre—a range of different events. One of the major changes this year is the introduction of Van Gogh Alive, which is a commercial event that has been brought into the precinct and certainly adds to the content and leverages off the government’s investment in the main festival.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned Floriade. I am wondering: has the directorate done any

modelling to estimate the impact that the cancellation of Floriade has had on the ACT, Chief Minister?

Mr Barr: It has generally returned between \$30 million and \$40 million, broadly speaking. Obviously, the higher the attendance from interstate and overseas the greater the economic contribution. But it would be in that ballpark.

THE CHAIR: Okay; thank you.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, obviously we are all excited to see Enlighten back, but with tourism rebounding and more people coming into our CBD there is going to be more waste, more rubbish. Can I get a bit of an update on what we are doing with Enlighten specifically to minimise our carbon footprint with these events and our rubbish?

Mr Barr: Yes. I think Mr Triffitt might be in a position to talk about that.

Mr Triffitt: Yes. Thank you, Chief Minister. Certainly, there have been efforts under the single-use plastics act to reduce single-use plastics at major events. A range of the banned items have been eliminated from the traders that are trading at the Enlighten festival. We also manage additional waste streams for additional sorting to try to minimise the amount of waste that is going to landfill. I do not have the exact details with me, but there has certainly been a concerted effort to reduce the waste that goes to landfill, to maximise the amount that is being recycled but also to reduce the amount of waste, in the first instance, that is making its way through those channels.

THE CHAIR: Right. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: Just one quick one. I know that, at least in my electorate down in Tuggeranong, the container deposit scheme vending machine has been very popular. Is there any intention to make these accessible during these events, again to minimise waste but also promote that activity, if the vending machines are transportable and can be put where big groups of people are?

Mr Barr: I am not sure that they are that transportable, but I will check with TCCS, so we will take that on notice.

MR DAVIS: Great; thank you.

MS LEE: I want to take you to the tourism.act.gov.au website. It provides snapshots per quarter and I notice that there is data from September 2019, December 2019, March 2020 and it stops at June 2020. So there is almost two years of no data. Obviously, we have been impacted by COVID, but is there information and data that not just the community but the tourism sector can access that is more up to date?

Mr Barr: I would invite officials to address that. Obviously, the international data has been basically zero for two years because of closed borders, but in terms of domestic there would be data. Mr Kobus, are you able to help there?

Mr Kobus: Yes. Thanks, Chief Minister. Yes, there is data available. We have a

partnership with the commonwealth, together with all states and territories, to collect data across both international and domestic sources. Those are called the national visitors survey and the international visitors survey. The data is collected through Tourism Research Australia, through a range of different means.

One of the challenges with that data is that it runs at a three-month lag, so we get three months retrospective reporting with that data. What we have found that, during the COVID period, because things have been changing so quickly, often the data that is reporting the three months previously has not been that useful for the industry when they are trying to manage the implications of what is happening day to day through the period.

Our visitor economy peaked in the middle of 2019, where we met the 2020 target of just over \$2.5 billion in economic contribution. The last set of data that we have available is September 2021, so the next round of three-month lag data is due out shortly. There are contrasts in how the data has worked. Our domestic overnight visitor expenditure in 2019, at our peak, was \$1.86 billion, and for the year ending September 2021 it had reduced to \$1.18 billion. Probably one of the starkest contrasts, for obvious reasons, is in the international market. In 2019 the international market was worth \$565 million to the ACT economy and for the year ending September 2021 it had reduced to approximately \$10 million. The international visitors in 2019 were 5.9 million and in September 2021 they were just 15,000.

So in terms of rebuilding there is a significant gap to make up, with borders reopening. At a minimum, noting the Chief Minister's comments about some of the key markets not being open yet—China and New Zealand being a case in point—certainly international students, when they are visiting friends and relatives of international students, will start to make a difference in rebuilding that. In the months ahead, we are looking to invest in a range of things that rebuild our domestic overnight visitation.

MS LEE: Will the data from the September 2021 period that you just referred to, Mr Kobus, be uploaded onto the website in that snapshot format soon?

Mr Kobus: Yes, that can be uploaded onto the website. Usually what we also do is have an infographic that breaks down market shares and different markets. It is largely relevant for the domestic side of things, rather than the international side of things, due to borders being closed across that period.

MS LEE: Yes. When will that be uploaded?

Mr Kobus: That will be uploaded as soon as possible. The data exists, so if it is not there now, it can be uploaded within the next 24 hours.

MS LEE: Thank you. I have a question that is more just curiosity. When you go down into the snapshot—I am just looking at, for example, June 2021 now—down the bottom it has a breakdown of where they come from, in terms of our top local and international markets. In the domestic overnight visitors you have got ACT down there at zero per cent. Does that data come from hotel visitors that nominate the ACT as their home address?

Mr Kobus: Yes, that would be likely to be that. We do not really track the movement of ACT people within the ACT, even if they are staying in commercial premises in this city.

MS LEE: Yes, which is why I thought it was interesting that you have got the ACT in that column. The one that is even more interesting is the domestic day visitors; you have got the ACT there at 26 per cent. What measurements are you using there to come up with 26 per cent of ACT visitors classified as domestic day visitors?

Mr Kobus: That is a good question. In terms of the way the survey works, it might be ACT residents who have visiting friends and relatives who may have just elected to say that they are in the ACT for that purpose, so there is a bit of a margin of error there in terms of how that works. It could be people from the nearby region who have identified as being from the ACT. The domestic day visitors are quite a significant part, given that the ACT is an island within New South Wales. The economic contribution that day visitors make to the ACT is quite significant. Over the period in 2019 I think there were about 3.9 million domestic day visitors that crossed the border.

MS LEE: So how is that measured? Is it people who come and attend some of the monuments or whatever that we have in the ACT? How is it measured?

Mr Kobus: The national visitors survey is as it is described. It is a survey, so people are surveyed in market about where they have come from, are they here overnight, are they here for the day, their length of stay and the types of activities that they are engaging in whilst they are in Canberra. That is managed through the research investment that we make, with other states and territories, with Tourism Research Australia.

MS LEE: All right; no worries.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank CMTEDD officials today for your attendance. Would any witnesses who have taken a question on notice—I believe there have been a couple of them—please provide those answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We will now have a brief suspension for the changeover of witnesses and return in a moment for session 2, to hear from the Chief Minister in his capacity as Minister for Economic Development.

Short suspension.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome back the Chief Minister in his capacity as Minister for Economic Development. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Before you speak, please introduce yourself and the capacity in which you appear today and at that time confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

There will be no opening statements this morning, so I will start with the first question. Chief Minister, I would like to ask you some questions about the Canberra Economic Recovery Advisory Group and the subcommittees. I am wondering where the terms of reference are for the subcommittees. Have the committees been formed yet and where can we get a copy of the terms of reference?

Mr Barr: The group has finished its work, and I will be releasing an economic development priorities paper shortly. The terms of reference for the group are on a website somewhere. I will get the address for the committee. I think there was one other question in there about the subcommittees. I will invite Ms Arthy to address that one.

Ms Arthy: I have read and understood the privilege statement. The terms of reference were set up in anticipation of the Canberra Economic Advisory Group—it was renamed—to form subcommittees if needed. During the course of the work, there were no decisions to set up subcommittees, so there have been none in existence.

As the Chief Minister said, the CEAG, the Canberra Economic Advisory Group, was set up for six months work to provide advice. That has now concluded and, as I said, we will confirm where the terms of reference is on the website, make sure that that is updated, and provide you with the link.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Will the minutes of meetings and things like that be publicly available as well?

Ms Arthy: The nature of the discussions meant it was not a typical meeting with minutes; however, a communique will be published shortly. We are just finalising that with the members of the advisory group. Unfortunately, because of the COVID lockdown—it came right at the end of the deliberations—we were unable to finalise the report at the time, so I am just in the process of doing that now. I expect it to be available shortly.

THE CHAIR: Shortly being within months or weeks?

Ms Arthy: Probably months. I am just working with them now, but we are trying to wrap it up as quickly as we can.

THE CHAIR: Can you talk me through any specific recommendations that the CEAG have made to the ACT government?

Mr Barr: I will be releasing the economic development priorities in the coming weeks, so it will be there, and I will not be talking about them now.

THE CHAIR: All right. I look forward to reading those. Thank you. Let us move on. Mr Davis, do you have a substantive question?

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, I note in output 33 that the ACT government has plans to support our local athletes when they compete in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. Are you able to give us a little bit more detail about exactly what supports we are providing?

Mr Barr: No. I think the Minister for Sport might be better placed there, but there are officials in the room who would have that responsibility who may be able to take it on notice, if they do not have it in front of them now. That is not an economic development thing. That would be a sport and recreation thing, I imagine.

MR DAVIS: I imagine it would fall under elite sporting performance.

Mr Barr: No.

MR DAVIS: Okay.

Mr Barr: That relates to a handful of teams that play at Canberra venues, not Olympic or Commonwealth Games athletes. That is in Sport and Recreation.

MR DAVIS: Okay, that makes sense. I am interested, Chief Minister, to get a bit more information about the Jobs for Canberrans programs. How many people were employed so far through the Jobs for Canberrans initiative?

Mr Barr: Hundreds, but I will need to take the exact number on notice.

MR DAVIS: Okay. Are there plans to continue this kind of jobs program, post pandemic?

Mr Barr: No.

MR DAVIS: Okay. What modelling has been done, if any, to identify if there may be value in extending the program?

Mr Barr: The Jobs for Canberrans program related to the pandemic and periods within it when we needed significant economic stimulus and when there was a risk of people being unemployed. We now have a situation where we have more job vacancies than we have unemployed people and we have skills shortages, so there is not a need for the public sector to step in to support the labour market at this point in time.

I can advise it was 550 people who were supported through the Jobs for Canberrans program, but given our current economic circumstance and the return to more normal economic settings, you would not need to put in place emergency labour market measures like Jobs for Canberrans as a permanent feature of our labour market.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, in terms of the 550 jobs that were created under this program, No 1: how do you measure that it was under this program? No 2: can you

just tell us the nature of them? Are they ongoing; are they temporary?—those kinds of statistics.

Mr Barr: There was an appropriation of \$28.8 million. So if people were employed out of the appropriation then that would be how they were defined as coming under the program. Most of the positions—in fact, I think all of them—were temporary, because it was an emergency labour market program, but many of the individuals have gone on to fill permanent jobs within the public service. That includes graduates. I am told that at least 58 people who were part of the program are now in longer-term roles within the ACT public service.

MS LEE: You mentioned “many of them,” but you have just talked about 58 out of the 550. Can you take on notice the breakdown of the exact figure of the 550 jobs that have gone on to other, permanent jobs in the public service?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LEE: That would be great, thank you. And finally, could you tell us, on notice, the levels. You mentioned graduates, but could you tell us of any other levels as well—the classifications.

Mr Barr: I think we can do that in aggregate, not obviously for each individual person. We will not be naming individuals or their jobs, but in aggregate, yes, we could do that.

MS LEE: In aggregate. Yes, that would be great. Thank you.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, speaking in a local member capacity, a lot of what I hear anecdotally from constituents is what they feel they require from government is jobs that could be filled by an entry-level, shall we say, or low-skilled workforce; mowing is a good example. While you pointed out, in your answer to the earlier question, that there is a higher rate of job vacancies, do you see scope there for the possibility of this program extending for those particular kinds of entry-level, low-skilled jobs that would assist with some of those City Services types of roles of the government?

Mr Barr: Providing employment of that kind on a more permanent basis within directorates, yes, but not under the banner of Jobs for Canberrans, which, as I said, was an emergency labour market support program that was temporary contracts in a defined period of emergency.

MR DAVIS: Okay. That is good to know, thank you.

MS ORR: Just on the CBRIN, how has the Canberra Innovation Network been supporting entrepreneurs and businesses, including start-ups as we come out of the lockdown and look to that economic recovery?

Mr Barr: In a variety of ways. The network has a number of partners outside of government and has worked exceptionally well to deliver a wide range of programs. I will invite officials in the room to talk about those.

Ms Arthy: There are quite a lot of initiatives that we can go through, and I have colleagues here who can talk in more detail. I think the main way that CBRIN has supported the sector has been around the different growth labs for all of their small- and medium-sized enterprises. They have also delivered 65 events, with 2,500 participants. That was just in the first half of the financial year.

They deliver First Wednesday Connect, which is where they connect young entrepreneurs or people with an idea with potential investors. They have also worked with quite a lot of companies, including in cyber, to help them accelerate and grow even during the COVID period. A range of ICON—Innovation Connect—programs have been made available and there are a range of other various entrepreneurship programs that they run. I can hand to my colleague, Mr Kobus, who can take you through that in a little bit more detail.

Mr Kobus: I have read and understand the privilege statement. The Canberra Innovation Network, as has been described, helps boost the entrepreneurial capacity of early-stage businesses and start-ups in the ACT. Their work plan is broken into a number of pillars, where they look to implement programs to support those early-stage businesses.

Across the last 12 months, they have run a range of education events that support business, in terms of education and coaching of those businesses, to help them get established and operating commercially. They run a range of collaborative innovation programs. For example, they have delivered 15 collaborative events over that period on particular topics, where ideas have been explored to help advance matters in relation to individual, particular sectors.

They also do a range of outreach programs to promote the value of innovation from a marketing perspective. They deliver workshops and they support businesses promoting their entrepreneurial capability, but also ACT's strengths in innovation. They run a range of networking events, as well, for those early-stage businesses to help them connect, build relationships and collaborate.

In addition, the Canberra Innovation Network works with the ACT government to deliver grant programs that focus on supporting those early-stage businesses. An example of that would be our ICON grants program, through which the Canberra Innovation Network work with government to provide financial support to help those early-stage businesses scale up. During COVID we ran a particular program that supported those early-stage businesses to navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 period, with a range of investments going to them to help them to adapt and to evolve their businesses to cope with the challenges that COVID-19 presents for early-stage start-ups.

MS ORR: What are some of the adaption measures that you have seen happen and some of the innovations that have come from these times? What sorts of things might we see going forward?

Mr Kobus: The range of businesses that go through the Canberra Innovation Network are many and varied. Some of the adaptations have been in businesses understanding how to engage with markets in different ways. During COVID-19, the range of ways

people can even communicate with different parts of industry have evolved and the ways that those businesses access those markets have also evolved. For example, if a business was starting up and looking to access export capability or attract foreign direct investment in their businesses, they would probably have to evolve their business plan to deliver those things in a slightly different way. So that funding went to help those early-stage businesses adapt their focus and how their investment was applied, leading to a more normal period of operation where they still had a foundation from which to grow more normally.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

MS LEE: Mr Kobus, are CBRIN staff allowed to invest in businesses that come to CBRIN for assistance, advice and help?

Mr Kobus: CBRIN staff do invest in early-stage businesses, yes.

MS LEE: Okay. And what are some of the processes in place to manage any potential conflicts that might arise?

Mr Kobus: An example of a process where there could be a conflict would be through application of grants, for example. The Canberra Innovation Network has a range of processes in place, through their own governance, to ensure that those staff members are not involved in any decision-making that relates to how investment is applied from other sources to those early-stage businesses.

MS LEE: Thank you. You mentioned the ICON grants earlier in your answer to Ms Orr. Are those grants able to be awarded to companies if CBRIN staff are shareholders in those companies, or investors?

Mr Kobus: I will have to take that question on notice.

MS LEE: I note that in your previous answer you talked about the discussions they have had about it.

Mr Kobus: Yes.

MS LEE: I just want to know whether there is a specific rule in place or a procedure. If you can take that on notice, that would be great.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned start-ups earlier. I am interested in the figures of the start-ups that never make it. Does anyone in government keep that information, those stats?

Mr Kobus: We do not have data from CBRIN that details the number of start-ups that do not make it. CBRIN plays a very particular role and that is supporting businesses to get to the stage where they have the capacity to operate and realise commercial success. The way in which those businesses track post engagement with CBRIN is sometimes outside of the view of the Innovation Network.

MS LEE: I have another supplementary question related to the question that you have

taken on notice, Mr Kobus—my previous question. Can you also take on notice and provide to the committee the number of businesses that have been awarded the ICON grant of which CBRIN staff are shareholders?

Mr Kobus: Yes.

MS LEE: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, just back to my question. Do you, in any of your portfolios, have that information on how many start-ups do not make it in Canberra?

Mr Barr: The ABS records data on business entries and exits. You would then have to extrapolate from that what would constitute a start-up.

THE CHAIR: A new business starting up in Canberra.

Mr Barr: Yes. The ABS records data on business entries and exits. They record that data based on a number of subcategories for businesses. They record those who have no employees, those who have a handful of employees—I think from memory it is one to four—and then I think it is five to 19, and then 20-plus. So businesses are broken down into those categories. If you made the presumption that start-ups did not start up with, say, 15 or 20 employees, and you just looked at data for businesses that start up with no employees or fewer than five, you could potentially extrapolate something there.

All we can ascertain from that ABS data is that the ACT has the strongest business growth of any jurisdiction in Australia. I track this annually. Our growth in the number of businesses operating in the territory was the fastest in the nation in the last reporting period, and the bulk of them were businesses with fewer than five employees. If you can extrapolate anything from that, it would be that start-ups have more success in the ACT than elsewhere. But we will compile the available data and I can present that to the committee on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I note that the ACT has the most businesses starting, but we also have the highest rate of failure. I am wondering what is going wrong. It is all well and good to say we have more businesses starting up here in Canberra, but we do have the highest number of businesses going out of business.

Mr Barr: Yes. That is because we have the most activity in terms of a proportion of the existing business base to the new. So we have more of everything, but the net impact is that we have the fastest growing business base of any jurisdiction in Australia.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, I would like to take you to the business and innovation grants and sponsorship recipients that are listed on page 162 of the annual reports, noting that the total amount for the scheme is \$200,000. It is interesting to note that there is one business that received \$150,000 of that fund, or 75 per cent, and it has been awarded to Significant Capital Ventures, which is founded by the Hindmarsh family in collaboration with ANU. It was awarded “to support its administration costs”. Can you please explain what that grant was awarded for? Administration costs

just seems a bit odd. Thank you.

Mr Barr: Significant Capital Ventures is obviously a venture capital fund that invests in other businesses. So this would be for support to enable them to continue that role. But I will get officials to give you some more detail on that.

MS LEE: Thank you.

Ms Arthy: Thank you, Chief Minister. Significant Capital Ventures has been in operation for a couple of years now. We have provided \$750,000 to Significant Capital Ventures to support its establishment and subsidise its administration costs. The allocation that is listed in the annual report is an ongoing commitment underneath that arrangement to provide administration support to that fund.

MS LEE: It is being provided because that was the agreement when it was established; is that right?

Ms Arthy: I do not have the agreement in front of me. I can certainly check on that and take that one on notice. However, we did provide the initial funding to support its establishment and administration. They made an approach to us for additional support, and we recommended that the support be provided to assist it, given the work it is doing.

MS LEE: I am sorry, I am still a bit unclear about why a venture fund would need subsidies or support for administration costs.

Ms Arthy: I am just checking if another official in the room has that background. I may need to take that on notice and go back to the original agreement that we had with them. We do support another venture capital fund, and it depends on the nature of the agreement and what they have asked us for in the beginning. This particular fund was set up to do work in a particular niche area. Again, I do not have the contract in front of me. We can take that on notice and provide more information.

As part of our contribution to getting this particular fund set up, the role of the government was to provide establishment costs and that admin support. We can go back to the original agreement and come back to you on notice with more detail about the nature of that agreement.

MS LEE: Can you please also outline who gets any profits.

Ms Arthy: Certainly. I can do that.

Mr Barr: Yes. This is a reasonably longstanding arrangement. So, yes, we can get all of that detail for you. I think this also reflects the fact that the officials in the room were not the officials who would have been involved in the negotiation of that agreement. But this is not new, Ms Lee; it has been around for quite some time, and I am very happy for all of the information related to it to be provided to the committee.

MS LEE: Thank you. On notice, because I think Ms Arthy referred to the original agreement a number of times, are you able to provide a copy of that to the committee

as well?

Mr Barr: Absolutely, yes.

MS LEE: Could you include some details, if it is not stated clearly in the agreement, as to the reason this organisation was chosen—what criteria and that type of thing.

Mr Barr: Absolutely, yes. Certainly. No problems at all.

MS LEE: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask about the cyber hub and the ACT government's role in the cyber hub. I would like some clarification about that. On page 60 of the annual report there is a statement that says, "Delivered by industry," but page 61 says, "The ACT government will implement the Canberra Cyber Hub." Other than the \$700,000 investment, what involvement does the ACT government have in the actual delivery of the project?

Mr Barr: Ms Arthy, do you want to assist here, or another official?

Ms Arthy: The Canberra Cyber Hub has only recently been incorporated as a company. In the lead-up to that, over the course of a couple of years, we have been working with various members in the sector—from the universities and from local industry—to look at what can be done to position Canberra's cyber security industry far better, knowing that we have the proximity to the Commonwealth government and the enormous investment that they were making, and the fact that we had such fantastic universities here. We are looking at how we can bring everyone together to really advance the cyber industry.

Our involvement very early on was one of facilitation. We started by talking to the various stakeholders to understand if there was a willingness or an interest in doing something different in the ACT about cyber security in an industry development. We then commissioned a research project run by Nous, where they did several workshops and a lot of consultation with the sector, including universities and local business. It came up with a recommendation that a Canberra cyber hub, which brings together four main pillars around education and training, business acceleration, research capability and marketing and engagement—one that is set up in a way that brings together businesses with the university sector and the vocational education and training sector—would be of value.

Over the course of, I think, 12 months—and it was COVID interrupted—we pulled together a proposal for a Canberra cyber hub and took that back out to industry. It was very well supported, and it culminated late last year in the Canberra Cyber Hub being incorporated, with its inaugural directors and the members being the ACT government and CBRIN, the Canberra Innovation Network. It has now started its operation as an independent body and is really focusing at the moment on education and training and connecting businesses with opportunities and training on how they can pitch themselves for business. Our involvement has been, in the early days, in terms of facilitation and we then ran the process to establish it. Now we have an ongoing funding agreement with them for delivery of activities that benefit the Canberra cyber

industry.

THE CHAIR: Can I ask about the cost. How much did the research project cost? What were the costs involved with that?

Ms Arthy: I do not have this with me. I will see if I can get it before the end of these hearings. If not, I will take it on notice.

THE CHAIR: Is it the Nous Group? Are they still on the public payroll? I am happy for you to take that one on notice as well.

I want to talk a bit more about the education portal. The report says it was supposed to be launched in late 2021. However, in the media release on 10 December 2021, Chief Minister, you indicated that the portal would not launch until 2022. Can you talk to us about why this project has been delayed?

Mr Barr: COVID, in short. There was a massive diversion of resources across the entirety of government into the COVID response.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Thank you.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, do you have updated timeframe on that?

Mr Barr: Officials may be able to help with that.

Ms Arthy: The last discussion I had with the cyber hub is that it was very soon. I am just checking that. I have just been informed it is intended to launch this month. I do not have a specific date, but we can follow that up with the cyber hub.

MS ORR: Chair, can I have a supplementary question, please?

THE CHAIR: Certainly.

MS ORR: With respect to the cyber hub launching in March, what will be its priorities over the next 12 months?

Mr Barr: Ms Arthy might be able to help there.

Ms Arthy: Certainly. The priorities really go around those four pillars that I was mentioning. The big priority is getting the portal up and running. With the portal, for the first time we will be listing all education and training offerings in the ACT related to cyber so that any business or anyone who wants to study cyber will be able to go there and get the information in one spot, which will be an enormous opportunity.

The cyber hub is also looking at how it can describe cyber occupations a bit more simply, so that people do not get scared off if they want a career in cyber, because one of the biggest challenges the sector faces is workforce shortages. They are doing a lot of work around how they translate cyber occupations into language for everyone to be involved. For example, accountants who might want a change in career may not think of cyber as being a natural fit for them, but it actually is. So there is a fair bit of work

there.

A lot of work is going to be happening about communicating what Canberra's cyber ecosystem offers, because quite often what we are hearing from our business sector is that getting their first customer is often the most difficult thing. So we are looking at how we can connect our companies with each other and with potential clients. There is a big focus around our cyber workforce, because that is the biggest issue facing the sector. Those are the main priorities for this year.

MS ORR: So that is looking at how the hub will support the sector, but is there any work in place on how the hub might draw attention to the ACT's capabilities more broadly in this area?

Ms Arthy: Yes, absolutely. That is one of the reasons they were set up, and that is part of that communication piece I mentioned earlier. It is about marketing ACT's capability, not just to potential customers, but more broadly. It is one of our key capability areas. In that area we want to make sure that when people around the globe think about cyber and cyber capability, or trying to get an education or do research in cyber, they think of Canberra first. That is our goal.

MS ORR: Thank you.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, I understand that the enterprise bargaining for the new agreements for all ACT public servants will be undertaken this year. What role do you think the ACT government has as an employer to stimulate wage growth in the city?

Mr Barr: It is slightly outside the remit of this hearing, but thank you for the question.

MR DAVIS: I ask, Chief Minister, on the basis that what we are hearing from a lot of people, particularly in the small business community, is the lack of available customers, and that those that are available are not spending as much as they usually would. So I am interested to know, as a major employer in the city, how you see that enterprise bargaining relating to economic growth, or at least maintaining our economic position.

Mr Barr: Sure. The level of aggregate demand in the economy is obviously an important contributing factor to the level of total economic activity. There are areas of ACT government employment where decisions by the territory government potentially crowd out available employment in the private sector. So we have to balance our needs for staff in particular areas against what is happening in the broader economy. But it would be fair to say that the Reserve Bank governor's policy stance is supported by the territory.

MR DAVIS: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Orr, do you have a substantive question?

MS ORR: Yes, I do. Chief Minister, just on workforce attraction, we have heard quite a bit of commentary that that is one of the big challenges we face as we start to look to economic recovery. What tool is the ACT government providing to industries to assist

them in attracting the workforce and the skills that they need here to the ACT?

Mr Barr: This certainly will be both a challenge and an opportunity in a post-COVID world. What we have seen broadly, both in Australia and globally, is that the pandemic has led to a shift in settlement patterns. There has been a move out of Sydney and Melbourne into other cities and regional areas. Canberra, together with, I think, Brisbane, have been the two major beneficiaries of that. I think most of the other capital cities have had a small net impact on their total population, particularly amongst working-age people, whereas Brisbane and Canberra have had a net positive in terms of interstate migration.

There are factors in our favour around workforce attraction. One of the principal ones is that on a per capita basis the ACT has the greatest density of education capital of any Australian city. So the workforce attraction opportunities stem, at a graduate and postgraduate level, from the students we attract into Canberra, both domestic and international, for both postgraduate and undergraduate study, together with the investments that the government is making in public TAFE to support the growth of particular industry sectors. But clearly there is a very significant responsibility at an enterprise level for businesses to be investing in training and attraction and retention of staff.

That will take many forms. The most obvious market-facing one is the wages, salaries, conditions of employment and flexibility of employment, that employers offer. This touches on Mr Davis's earlier question around the ACT public sector as an employer. We have made a very clear decision, in relation to our own employment structures and flexibility, to support hybrid working and to support flexibility. That is part of an attraction and retention strategy for the ACT public sector. Businesses are going to have to do the same thing.

Given where the labour market is—and I repeat the point, that there are more job vacancies than there are unemployed people; so it is an employee's market now—employees will demand higher wages, better conditions and work-life balance, and that is something that the ACT and Canberra offers. Compared to other cities and jurisdictions, that is a real strength for us. The fact is that this is a city that gives time back to people. This is a city that focuses on wellbeing. This is a city that, in terms of its values and the agenda that it is pursuing, attracts a particular type of person—one who is interested in social justice, the public sector, sustainability, and responding to national and global challenges. Canberra is a city like no other. It has a purpose, and people come here to work for the national and international good, and that is an offering that not many other cities in this country, or around the world, have.

That is part of our offering—our lifestyle, the quality of life in this city, the quality of our education system and our health system and all of the other services that are delivered provide a massive competitive advantage. When that is coupled with the best higher education density and the best education and training opportunities, we really are very well positioned for the future. But this is not just a journey for government as an employer or as an enabler; it is something that the private sector needs to embrace. Through entities like the Innovation Network, and our largest non-government employers, including the universities themselves, we are seeing that opportunity being embraced in a big way. So I am optimistic about the short and

medium term. I think Canberra is very well placed, and this will mean that our city will continue to grow, that we will attract people from elsewhere in Australia and overseas, and that we will retain people who currently live in Canberra or who have come to Canberra to study.

MS ORR: Very comprehensive answer. Thank you.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, needless to say, we are all fans of Canberra; otherwise we would not be here. I refer you to an article that was in the *Canberra Times* only last week that Canberra was, or is, the least-known capital city in the world, actually by a long way. Obviously we know some of the benefits but people will not know those benefits, or get to know them, if they do not know that Canberra exists and that it is a capital city. What is the ACT government doing, or planning to do differently, to raise that profile to ensure that we do attract global talent to our city—obviously for sustainable development and growth but especially in the advanced technologies, the creative industries and the like?

Mr Barr: I think the methodology for that survey was curious. It was who had asked the question. You could in fact turn that around and go, “People were interested to know what the capital of Australia was and they were searching for it.” Presumably, having searched that, they now have the answer. That is a very positive thing for us, that there were millions of searches for, “What’s the capital of Australia?” But I am not sure that the methodology is particularly a statistically valid survey to which to make the claim we are the least-known capital city.

It did have heavy qualifications, because it pointed out that this was amongst, I think, OECD countries or first-world capitals. The second least-known was Ottawa, the capital of Canada. I think we are in reasonably good company in that regard. I would look at it the other way and go that people were searching for the Australian capital. They now know the answer.

To perhaps address the more substantive element of your question in relation to promoting Canberra, that is certainly a factor. I think Canberra is pretty well known in the Australian context, and I think the institutions within Canberra, such as the ANU, CSIRO and others, are reasonably well known within our region, as in the Asia-Pacific. We will continue to utilise those clear strengths.

But I hark back to the discussion in relation to tourism as well. There are only so many markets we can be in; so we do have to focus our efforts and align the priorities of those institutions within the city, particularly the universities: skill shortage and what kinds of skills are we looking to attract into the ACT. Fortunately there is quite a strong alignment between a tourism approach and the markets in which we have the best opportunities to establish more direct transport links and greater trade in services, which is largely what this is about. The international engagement strategy, the international tourism strategy, the economic development priorities are all aligning around a series of opportunities for the ACT. Those key markets are pretty clear.

What we need to do across tourism, investment attraction, workforce attraction, student attraction, is focus and align our efforts. We have a city brand. We have a new brand for Australia, finally. I think there is a good opportunity to undertake our

domestic work around Australia and then, in partnership with Austrade, with Tourism Australia and with the national bodies, look to key international markets. I think we are well placed.

Of course one of the issues we face at the moment is that we cannot even travel to many of the markets that we would want to. This will progressively ease as COVID restrictions ease and international travel resumes.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, back to the flexibility—and you are calling on businesses to offer similar flexibility to what the ACT public service does—I am interested to hear how you think business can do that.

Mr Barr: It is not really for me to say, because—

THE CHAIR: But you are asking them to do that. Think of hairdressing where we know there is a massive skill shortage. We have only 10 apprentices for hairdressing in the ACT. With hairdressers, what we are finding is there are no workers; so there is no flexibility for that business. Car yards are open constantly. Yet you are saying that employees have the opportunity to ask for more money while businesses have to be flexible. I do not understand. I think you are out of touch with the business community.

Mr Barr: No-one has to work for a business. They can choose to work wherever they want in a free market economy; so they will go to the places that offer them the most money and the most flexible conditions. That is a market economy at work. You cannot force people—

THE CHAIR: But businesses are not able to make the money if their rents are too expensive. They have got commercial rates to deal with. They are trying to give their workers flexibility, which we want to do. Of course it is just not possible all the time.

Mr Barr: That is the market at work. That is capitalism. I am not here to, and I do not propose to, undo capitalism in the ACT. We have a labour market. It is an equation between supply and demand. That is how it works. And that is not just between industries, that is even between businesses in an industry. If you want to attract more people into hairdressing, you are going to have to improve the pay and conditions in hairdressing.

THE CHAIR: Then the hairdressers have to charge more than \$300 for the hairdo and the consumer is going to—

Mr Barr: I do not have to pay \$300 for a haircut but I have less hair than many. Men's haircuts are a little cheaper.

MS LEE: I am just a little speechless after that interaction.

Mr Barr: I am not sure that the price of haircuts is an economic development issue, but nevertheless.

THE CHAIR: It goes to the point of the business community and economic recovery

in the ACT.

Mr Barr: That is about fuelling aggregate demand, which is around more money in the economy, which is an economic development priority. But the labour market is the labour market. It is a market.

MS LEE: I am just a bit astounded because everything that you have just said in the last couple of minutes has been a complete slap in the face to the businesses that have been doing it really, really tough. Do you not see how frustrating that is for our small business owners who have had probably the toughest two years for most of their business life, to have their Chief Minister, to have their head of government, say, “That is just the way the market works,” and mansplain this? Do you not understand how frustrating that would be? I was going to let this go but this is just astounding.

Mr Barr: What I am suggesting is that the answer is not to pay people less, and what—

MS LEE: I am not saying that, but do you understand that it goes to your messaging?

Mr Barr: Yes.

MS LEE: What we are hearing from businesses is, “You know what, we would just like some empathy; we would like some understanding from our Chief Minister.” What they are asking for is some empathy for what they have been going through, and I just do not understand, for someone who professes to understand what they are going through, how you sit here in this annual report public hearing and continue to say, “That is just the market and that is how it works.” I just do not understand how you see that that would be so unhelpful to these businesses. Can you at least understand that it is going to be extremely frustrating, extremely disheartening for the businesses to hear their own Chief Minister say this during one of the most economically tough times that they have probably faced?

Mr Barr: Is that a question or a statement?

MS LEE: As I said, I am going to move on but, when you continued to do this, I just could not.

Mr Barr: You have made the statement. Would you like me to answer or respond to that statement?

MS LEE: Perhaps if you could answer. Can you see where they might be coming from?

Mr Barr: Yes. I understand that there are skill shortages but I am telling you that the answer to that is to invest in people, and the businesses are going to have to do that themselves. We are not the employer; they are.

MS LEE: Perhaps if you talked to the businesses. They hear things like, “Why don’t you go and invest yourself?” These are people who have had to actually rely on their own mortgages, put their own mortgages on the line to keep their staff paid, and they

have been doing that.

THE CHAIR: Yes, there are businesses that have done that.

MS LEE: I am just saying, can you at least see—

Mr Barr: Between the ACT and federal governments, more than \$2 billion of taxpayers' money has been provided to support businesses to do exactly that.

MS LEE: That is not my point at all.

THE CHAIR: That is not the point.

MS LEE: My point is: can you understand that, when they hear things like this, it is extremely frustrating and disheartening for these businesses? I think what they are asking for is, please, just a little empathy and a little understanding from their community leaders, and I think they are looking for that from you.

Mr Barr: What they are looking for—

MS LEE: Anyway, I made my point.

Mr Barr: What they are looking for is to drive the economy forward, to grow the economy and to create more opportunity. That is capitalism. That is how the system works.

THE CHAIR: Minister, on that point, I am going to just say thank you for explaining to me capitalism. I understand it. But I want you to understand and maybe talk to some more small businesses about how on earth they can match the flexibility of the working-from-home model. That is all I have to say.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, you referred to the importance of our university sector to our city and the growth of our economy—the UNSW Canberra city campus. Can you please provide an update in relation to the time line for the master plan and the government's response to that master plan?

Mr Barr: Yes. The master plan is heading to the NCA for its assessment process. That is in this calendar year. There has been, due to COVID, a delay of, I think, just slightly less than 12 months in relation to some of the time frames and milestone payments associated with those time frames. Ms Arthy may be able to provide some further detail in relation to the process beyond the National Capital Authority assessment of the master plan.

Ms Arthy: I will hand to Ms Priest very soon. She has got the more detailed time frames. But essentially the process from here is that, once it goes to the National Capital Authority for formal sign-off, it then comes back to the territory government for final agreement to proceed. That is spelt out in the deed. Part of that is also looking at the final agreement around the remediation of the site. Once those decisions are made and the government agrees to proceed and that particular milestone is met, it will then trigger the rest of the deed, which enables construction to

commence.

As the Chief Minister said, we bring in the experts that we need. UNSW has not been able to do the work that has been needed, because of COVID shortages. We have recently worked with them to agree a new set of time frames to update the deed. I can hand over to Ms Priest to tell you what those new dates are.

Ms Priest: As mentioned by the Chief Minister and Ms Arthy, we have been working closely with UNSW and the next step of the process is for UNSW to take their master plan to the National Capital Authority for formal endorsement. Following that endorsement, and we expect, prior to the end of this calendar year, the master plan would be brought back to the ACT government for final consideration and approval.

MS LEE: Thank you for that time line. The annual report refers to there being wide-ranging support for the development. I understand that the university carried out the consultation. Has the government received any feedback or consultation on that report, and what were the findings?

Ms Arthy: The government has received the master plan, which included the outcomes of the consultation. I have not got that in front of me. We can take that on notice, unless Ms Priest has it. As I said, there is widespread support. UNSW did a lot of work, particularly with the surrounding residents, because they were really conscious that they wanted to make sure that, whatever the development, it was in keeping with the surrounding community, particularly keeping the heritage strip intact. They were, as I say, the main support. Ms Priest, any other insights?

Ms Priest: I think that is right. Community engagement did show wide-ranging support for the draft master plan. As you have already referred to, that was undertaken by UNSW, who are leading the work obviously on their master plan. There is continued support for the campus. The movement of cars, cycles, pedestrian traffic, interaction with neighbouring areas and the cultural and environmental sustainability of the campus were identified as the key themes coming out of the consultation, but certainly with that sentiment of ongoing and large support.

MS LEE: Would you be able to provide a copy of that for the committee?

Ms Arthy: Can we take that one on notice, because I am not sure?

Ms Priest: We can take it on notice, and I will have to go and just review what it is up to on the UNSW website. But they were pretty good at publishing information on the outcome of their engagements and consultations. We will take that on notice, but that would be the place that we would first check.

Ms Arthy: That is right, yes. It is not our document. We will have to go back to the UNSW about where it is at.

THE CHAIR: I would like to ask about international student support. On page 119, I think it is table 35, it is revealed that \$225,000 was reallocated from the Study Canberra budget to support international students experiencing hardships during lockdown. How many students accessed those funds?

Mr Barr: We will get the exact number but the reason we had to do that was that those students were entirely abandoned by the Australian government.

THE CHAIR: But you will take on notice to get the numbers?

Mr Barr: What a way to welcome international students to our country!

THE CHAIR: Just within the ACT.

Mr Barr: It was just as well that the ACT and other state and territory governments provided support for those students.

THE CHAIR: What was the eligibility criteria, Chief Minister, for those students to access the support?

Mr Barr: Not being able to access any other support because the Australian government did not provide any.

THE CHAIR: Was it a one-off payment or was it a weekly payment to get them through that tough time?

Mr Barr: A combination of supports.

THE CHAIR: Can you talk me through what they were?

Mr Barr: Yes, including payments, including concessional access to particular ACT government supports and support that was provided by community service organisations, by the universities themselves. We can give a full list of all the things that we did, because those students were abandoned by the Australian government.

THE CHAIR: Living in the ACT, it is good to know that you are supporting the people that you are bringing here. It is excellent.

MR DAVIS: Chief Minister, we have spoken a lot about those who work for the federal government, those who work for the ACT government and those who work for themselves but we have spoken very little about those with no work at all. Has the ACT government done any modelling on what a raise to Newstart and other income support payments would mean for our economic recovery?

Mr Barr: It would increase aggregate demand in the economy. The evidence is very clear that those on the lowest incomes spend any additional money that they receive, as opposed to saving it. What we have seen over the last two years across the economy more broadly is that households have saved an extraordinary amount of money. It is hundreds of billions of dollars. That money will ultimately be spent in the economy—and we are starting to see that—and that raises the level of aggregate demand, which means more money flowing into businesses, which gives businesses more opportunity to pay people more, which in turn leads to more money in the economy, which in turn leads to more money going into businesses, which allows businesses to pay people more, which is a good thing.

In relation to those who are on statutory payments from the commonwealth, the experience—the lived experiment, if you like, during the first year of the pandemic—was that when that additional money was provided to those people it not only was the single largest exercise in lifting people out of poverty in living memory but it also increased the amount of spending in the economy. It was a net benefit.

In the ACT context the proportion of our community on those payments is the lowest proportion of any jurisdiction in Australia, in both—

THE CHAIR: We have lost you again, Chief Minister.

Mr Barr: Am I back?

THE CHAIR: You are.

Mr Barr: Where was I at in responding before the audio dropped?

MR DAVIS: I got the answer to my question. Given that we have got a good understanding about what the economic benefit would be—and of course I do not need to tell you what the social benefit would be for those living on income support payments—what has the ACT government done and what have you done specifically as Chief Minister to agitate and advocate for an increase to those income support payments?

Mr Barr: We have certainly been on the public record in supporting the increase that was made permanent. We supported the COVID supplementary payments, and I argued very strongly for them in various fora, both intergovernmental and public. We supported that proportion of it that was made a permanent increase but we believe there is scope for more.

I understand it cannot all be done in one increase, but I think there is an opportunity for a sustained, over a number of years, above-inflation level of increase to a number of these statutory payments. That would both have a positive economic impact, in terms of increasing aggregate demand and have the social benefits that we have discussed that I think are inherent in your question.

MR DAVIS: What would you say to those in the community who are so frustrated by the federal government's choice to keep so many Canberrans and Australians living below the poverty line and who are asking the ACT government to fill in the difference?

Mr Barr: The ACT is not in a position to supplement the federal social security system. We do not have either the mechanisms or the resources to do so. We have a very substantial concessions program that we do have the mechanisms with which to allocate payments, but it is according to criteria that are largely determined in terms of eligibility—whether you qualify for those commonwealth payments.

I understand that from time to time we get requests to fill the role of the federal government. We get that in almost every area of government activity. We are simply

not in a position to do so. If we were to accept that responsibility then that would allow the commonwealth to permanently abrogate that responsibility. That is unacceptable, given the relative level of budget and taxation-raising capability of the two levels of government.

MR DAVIS: Would it be fair to say that, until the federal government ponies up the dough, we will have people living in our city who are below the poverty line?

Mr Barr: Every city in Australia will have people living below the poverty line until that is addressed at a national level. But what I can say is that the number of people in the ACT experiencing that is lower than in other places. One thing that we can do, which I think is an important thing that we can do, is support a strong labour market and access to employment. We currently have more job vacancies than we have unemployed people, which implies that the jobs are there, but what is needed is investment in skills and training for the people who are currently unemployed to be able to access those available jobs. That is a shared responsibility between state and territory governments and the commonwealth, and it is an area that we have been pouring considerable additional resources into, in terms of our public education system, public TAFE and universities.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, the Major Events Fund has supported several major exhibitions over the summer at Canberra's institutions. Can you provide some examples of how the fund is bringing new content to Canberra?

Mr Barr: Yes. The events supported over this summer period include the *Jeffrey Smart Exhibition* at the NGA, the *Ancient Greeks Exhibition* at the National Museum, the *Australians & Hollywood Exhibition* at the National Film and Sound Archive and, coming up later this month, the *Shakespeare to Winehouse Icons* at the National Portrait Gallery. This is an exhibition that is a collaboration between the National Portrait Gallery of London and our National Portrait Gallery.

The Major Events Fund has been incredibly successful in leveraging greater visitation and economic activity in partnership with our national cultural institutions. These sorts of events, because of their duration and their wide appeal across Australia, and in the past internationally, are seeing some of the best returns on investment for ACT government investment in events. They are far and away the most effective way that we can drive economic activity and visitors to our city.

Cultural tourism is an incredible strength of the ACT. In terms of return on investment, there is nothing better available than these sorts of partnerships, and that is why the Major Events Fund has supported dozens and dozens of these sorts of events over the last 10 years and will do so into the future.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, can you just elaborate a little more on the economic impact that these major events have on the ACT and how important that is as part of the broader ACT recovery from the impacts of the COVID pandemic?

Mr Barr: On current projections we are on track to have leveraged \$1 billion of economic impact through the Major Events Fund since its establishment to the end of the current calendar year. Obviously, COVID-permitting, this current series of major

events will continue to attract the sorts of numbers that we have experienced with past events. That is a very significant return on investment over a decade-long period. I do want to emphasise that cultural events have the strongest return on investment of any events that the ACT government invests in.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, is there anything that you have got planned for the future that would go to further supporting recovery through these initiatives?

Mr Barr: Yes. Aligned with our tourism 2030 objectives, our economic development priorities, in the event space we will also be developing an events 2030 plan. Again, that will have two time periods, 2023 through to 2026 and then 2027 to 2030. These plans will look to both short and medium-term and then slightly longer term opportunities in the cultural tourism area.

We will also support Minister Cheyne's statement of ambition for the arts. We will include major sporting events, national and international, but with a particular focus on national content and international content that involves Australian sporting teams. We will also extend it to broader community and cultural events that include ACT-government-run events like Enlighten, Floriade, the new winter festival, the National Multicultural Festival—those sorts of existing events—to see a diverse and extensive event program for the ACT as we recover from the pandemic.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, will you commit to going through ACT businesses for all these events, as much as possible?

Mr Barr: As much as possible.

THE CHAIR: We have a broad range of local businesses that can handle all these things.

Mr Barr: Yes, certainly there is, and that has been the policy approach to date. We cannot necessarily use ACT-based companies for every single element of everything because sometimes that capability does not exist in the territory. But where we can, we do.

THE CHAIR: I think at times it has gone to outside businesses where the capability is here. I hope that the people who are organising these events are proactively reaching out. Can we have a guarantee that they will proactively reach out to ACT businesses?

Mr Barr: Within the acceptable procurement guidelines that are legislated and regulated, yes.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, I want to talk about the priority investment program. When the ACT government invests in projects through the priority investment program, does the government have equity in the programs or the companies or is it a grant-style cash injection?

Mr Barr: Principally grant style, and I can get officials to talk about that.

Mr Kobus: The priority investment program was launched in 2018-19. There was \$9.75 million provided over three years for that program. The last round of the program was in 2020-21, with a total of \$1.84 million going into a range of different projects. Largely the activities that are supported go towards facilitating collaboration between the institutions and the private sector.

Some examples of projects that were delivered through the last round of funding include investment in an interactive film studio through the Academy of Interactive Entertainment; an investment in some advanced manufacturing through a Canberra company, Liquid Instruments; a collaboration between the University of New South Wales and a cyber security company, Penten.

Largely, those investments go towards achieving the broader economic objectives of bringing skilled labour to Canberra, creating new jobs, creating opportunities for new investment and promoting the ACT's capabilities across some of our P-sectors as well.

THE CHAIR: How many expressions of interest did the directorate receive and how many business cases?

Mr Kobus: I will pass to Mr Balaretnaraja to provide the detail on that.

Mr Balaretnaraja: It has varied through the various rounds. The jobs and economic recovery round was a two-stage process. I will have to take that exact question on notice. But it was above 20 in the first stage, and through to the second stage was, I think, around four. But I will clarify.

THE CHAIR: The detail would be great. The annual report notes that four projects received funding under the priority investment program but two were pending final contract negotiations; so they were not included in this annual report. Can you give me some details about those two businesses and just how much funding for those businesses has been set aside—what the funding is for them?

Mr Balaretnaraja: I can. I understand those contracts have now been settled. One of those projects was to the Academy of Interactive Entertainment for a film plus virtual studio, and that was \$389,000. The second was to the University of Canberra for a digital building and built environment hub, and that was \$369,000.

THE CHAIR: The funding guidelines point to the creation of sustainable jobs as part of the selection criteria to receive this funding. How many local jobs have been created by the four funded projects? Chief Minister, I am wondering if you know the answer to that.

Mr Barr: I will take on notice the exact number.

MS ORR: Minister, I just want to get an update on the renewable energy industry development strategy and how that is progressing in its implementation. That is in this session, I believe.

Mr Barr: Yes, I think so. Let me just see if I have got anything. I think it was largely addressed in the climate action hearings. Yes. There was a 2015 strategy, but I think

most of this output has now shifted across into the climate action space.

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, we are obviously a smaller city. We have got venues like EPIC, Manuka Oval, GIO Stadium. Have you done any analysis on the types of events that Canberra is missing out on because we do not have any appropriate infrastructure? I know we have talked around this issue over time, but we have a little more time now.

Mr Barr: There are events of a particular scale in the context of sport and recreation that we are not able to host. Amongst those are the AFL and NRL grand finals, although they are principally contracted to venues in Sydney and Melbourne. I believe State of Origin rugby league men's football would be difficult to attract to Canberra Stadium, given it has not got 50,000 to 80,000 seats. It would only be in exceptional circumstances. There would be some international content involving Australian national teams that would be unlikely to be secured in the ACT. Bledisloe Cup rugby union would be an example.

We would also have difficulty attracting a cricket test match every single year, given contractual commitments in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and often Perth, and the number of cricket test matches that are played in an international summer. There would be a range of events in other sports where really only Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane is in a position to host. Most other domestic-level sport, we are able to host, with the proviso obviously of our earlier discussion around the availability of the AIS arena for certain indoor sport. If that were restored, then our capacity would therefore be pretty well every sporting event that you would anticipate a city of fewer than 500,000 people being able to host.

MS ORR: What are your comments for the Canberra Capitals at this time?

Mr Barr: It is incredibly disappointing that the commonwealth government unilaterally closed the AIS Arena, their home venue, without consulting them. I share the Capitals' frustration at the actions of the federal government in that regard. I do note that the ACT government has paid for a basketball floor in order to enable the Capitals to play their regular season games at an alternative ACT government-owned venue, the National Convention Centre. I understand that this current WNBL season has been impacted heavily by COVID restrictions that have seen rescheduling of matches and matches having to be abandoned because it is simply not feasible to play them as a result of COVID impacts on teams or border restrictions. It has been an incredibly frustrating season for the WNBL.

In the medium term, in addition to the National Convention Centre as a regular-season venue for the Capitals, their ability to play home finals at the AIS arena, which has served them well for many years, would be an important thing that the commonwealth government could do to support women's sport and to support sport in the ACT. That is what—

THE CHAIR: Chief Minister, you are the Chief Minister of the ACT, and I believe—

Mr Barr: That is right. I reiterate my call—

THE CHAIR: As opposed to GWS Giants, surely you could have put some money towards women's basketball here in the ACT?

Mr Barr: I just outlined that we have.

THE CHAIR: But on a national level. You say that the ACT is the frontrunner in so many areas, and I am just wondering why you continue to blame the feds when you have the opportunity to—

Mr Barr: They closed the venue; I did not.

THE CHAIR: Why have you not, over 20 years, decided to try and build something to make people come to the ACT?

Mr Barr: You are suggesting that we should have built another arena when we had one already?

THE CHAIR: Fight for the one that we have got here.

Mr Barr: I am. I have not heard anything from you or any of your colleagues criticising your federal party for what they have done to women's sport, particularly what they have done to the Capitals by unilaterally closing that arena.

THE CHAIR: Just getting back to my question—

Mr Barr: It is up to you now to do something. It is your party in government federally.

MS ORR: Chief Minister, can you just run me through why it would not have been appropriate to have an ACT stadium when the AIS stadium was in use, and what impact, as you have described it, the unilateral decision, where there was no consultation, to shut down the stadium has had on planning for what the ACT might be able to do?

Mr Barr: We obviously have limited capital that we can apply to sporting venues. We have limited capital that we can apply to arts and cultural venues, to business venues. When we have in our city commonwealth-owned venues, some of which the ACT government leases and looks after the maintenance of and ongoing investment in—Canberra Stadium being an example—we have to reflect on and understand who owns the asset and whose decision it is who can access it. The idea that we would duplicate an existing piece of infrastructure, on the off chance that the commonwealth would decide to abrogate their responsibilities in the context of the AIS, is a curious suggestion that is coming from at least one member of this committee.

THE CHAIR: On the \$2.5 million structure that you are thinking of putting up and that we read about in the paper today, my thoughts are that could have been done earlier by you as the Chief Minister of the ACT.

Mr Barr: That was investigated and ruled out as not being feasible. That it appeared on the front page of the paper today is akin to the *Northern Territory News* putting a

story about crocodiles on the front page. It is there to sell the newspaper. It has no basis as a decision that the ACT government was going to make. It was investigated and ruled out.

MS ORR: I am not sure I quite got to hear the final part of the answer to my question, because of all the interruptions. Chief Minister, is there anything else you had to finish saying before we move on?

Mr Barr: Indeed. As we look to longer term infrastructure needs for the territory, being able to have a dialogue with a commonwealth government who has any interest at all in the ACT and being able to have dialogue with a commonwealth government that has any interest at all in the future of the AIS in the ACT would be incredibly helpful to being able to resolve both arena and football stadium issues in the medium term.

It is certainly not for want of engagement by the ACT government that these issues have not been able to progress. We again call on the federal government to reopen the AIS arena.

THE CHAIR: I call on you as our Chief Minister to fight for Canberrans. Any other questions, I believe, can be put on notice. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the Chief Minister and officials from CMTEDD for your attendance today. There have been many questions taken on notice. Please provide the answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We will now break for lunch and return for session 3 to hear from Ms Cheyne, the Minister for Business and Better regulation. Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 11.28 am to 12.33 pm.

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

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Deputy Director-General, Economic Development

Engele, Mr Sam, Coordinator-General, Office for Climate Action

Clapham, Dr David, Executive Branch Manager, Economic and Regional Policy

Neiberding, Mr Craig, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Customer Coordination, Access Canberra

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

Rynehart, Mr Josh, Executive Branch Manager, Fair Trading and Compliance, Access Canberra

McKinnon, Ms Margaret, Chief Operating Officer, Access Canberra

Springett, Ms Emily, Executive Branch Manager; Engagement, Compliance and COVID-19 Response; Access Canberra

Lhuede, Mr Nick, Acting Executive Branch Manager; Construction, Utilities and Environment Protection; Access Canberra

Fulton, Ms Caroline, Executive Branch Manager, artsACT

Cultural Facilities Corporation

Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Chief Executive Officer

THE CHAIR: In this session we welcome Ms Cheyne, the Minister for Business and Better Regulation, and officials from CMTEDD. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege, and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Can you confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement? This is a new session with new witnesses, so when you first speak, please acknowledge the privilege statement.

We are not inviting opening statements today. I will ask the first question. Minister, I have questions about the Better Regulation Taskforce. We have discussed this before, and I note that, last time we spoke, phase 1 was not complete. Can you give me an update on that? Has it been completed?

Ms Cheyne: I confirm that I have read and understood the privilege statement, and the implications of it. As you might recall, Ms Castley, when commencing the discovery phase, the task force resolved to undertake a deeper level of engagement than was initially considered. That necessarily extended the time frame of the discovery period—as, of course, did the lockdown. However, a considerable number of activities had been, and have been, completed, including the finalisation of an engagement plan; facilitated workshops with stakeholders; one-on-one engagements; bilateral discussions; focus group engagement; and the commencement of a legislative review.

We did advise that the discovery phase and the report associated with that would be in the first half of this year, and that is still the intention. We do need to go through a cabinet process for the release of that report, but I can confirm that the drafting of that

is well underway. There has been a little bit of extra time associated with the drafting of that report, but for good reason. We thought it would be a more meaningful document; certainly, it has been my direction that it be not only a discovery report in terms of what we heard, but also a report in terms of what we are going to do. That has necessarily meant that a greater level of analysis has needed to be undertaken, which is, essentially, phase 2.

Phase 1 and phase 2 have started to be compressed. It does not mean any overall additions to the time frame of the task force's work, but it does mean that the discovery report that you will see, and that the community at large will see, when it is released, will be a more meaningful document.

THE CHAIR: Have the costs blown out due to the extra engagement, and can we get a list of those people that you have spoken to?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Ms Castley; I think we would be referring you to a question on notice that we provided from the estimates hearing, when I believe you asked the same question. I will check with the officials whether there have been any additions to that list. In terms of the cost, as was also previously advised, the task force discovery phase report is being done internally, with internal resources. I will check with Sam to see whether we have a further update on the previous question taken on notice.

Mr Engele: I am the head of the Better Regulation Taskforce in CMTEDD. In relation to the budget, there has been no increase in expenditure, largely because the majority of the work has been undertaken in house by ACT government staff. We have had a few additional engagements since that question was taken on notice. I will hand over to Dr Clapham to provide the specifics of those engagements.

Dr Clapham: I acknowledge the privilege statement. Yes, as the minister and Mr Engele have indicated, there has been a small amount of extra engagement since the last time that this question was asked and we provided that response to the question on notice.

The current figures are 134 engagements with individuals, representing 115 businesses as part of the discovery phase. The majority of discovery phase direct engagements with business concluded around October last year, as we moved, as the minister said, from phase 1 to phase 2, which was from the discovery engagement process into an analysis process.

Since that period in around October last year, while some engagements have continued, the focus has been on considering the feedback that we received through the various mechanisms that we employed—engagement with business; the legislative review that the minister referred to; the one on ones and the bilaterals; and some really good engagement with some of the key peak and member organisations in Canberra.

We have been considering and doing some analysis, validating, and taking into consideration the broader national regulatory reform better regulation best practice and quality framework thinking that has been emerging over the last couple of years to analyse that work; validate the issues and opportunities that we had identified through that engagement; and present, as the minister said, a report which is not just a

report back to the community on what we heard through the discovery phase but also an indication of what the forward work program of the Better Regulation Taskforce would be.

As the minister said, in doing that work now, rather than strictly segmenting into what we heard, then an analysis and then a work program, we have made up some of the time that was lost due to disruptions in 2021 and are able to continue the work of the task force within the time frames that were originally committed to.

THE CHAIR: Just to clarify, Minister, the discovery phase is over, and we are analysing that data and report writing; is that correct?

Ms Cheyne: The way I would describe it is that, while it is neat to describe them as phases, they are not necessarily discrete. As Dr Clapham mentioned just now, they are not segmented. While the report writing is continuing, there are still some discussions to be had. In terms of the intense period of engagement with businesses to identify those issues, certainly, that has largely concluded. I think the intention was that the discovery phase concludes when the discovery phase report is released. But the analysis work has been brought forward into the discovery phase, so there is that compression of those two phases.

MS ORR: Minister, there was a motion about dementia-friendly spaces. It was in the last term of government but it was a good motion. Can you provide an update on how Access Canberra is responding to and working on this particular issue?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. I will start; I will then hand over to officials who have been closely involved in this work to provide some further information. Access Canberra, I am very pleased to confirm, has committed to ensuring that when new service centres are designed, the needs of all customers are catered for, including older Canberrans and those who might be affected by dementia. This was stated explicitly in the age-friendly city plan, and it also arose from a recommendation to a previous committee, as you rightly noted, regarding our service centres being dementia friendly by mid-2022, this year.

Access Canberra engaged Dementia Australia to do a review in late 2020 which confirmed that all of our service centres are dementia friendly. I do not believe that review focused on Gungahlin at the time, because the review of Gungahlin was undertaken when the new Gungahlin service centre opened in 2018, which makes sense. The Belconnen service centre has recently opened. We formally opened it last week but it opened in January. It was recently reviewed by Dementia Australia and, as I understand it, received some praise for the thoughtful way in which it has been designed, including with very helpful input from the Council on the Ageing. We also ensure that staff undertake training in partnership with Dementia Australia. I might see whether Craig has anything further to add, to provide some more colour to that, Ms Orr.

Mr Neiberding: The minister addressed the majority of the question. However, our commitment to training is ongoing, to have all of our frontline workers dementia trained. The ability that we have with the dementia training is that it also addresses a number of other areas of vulnerability for Canberrans. It is a really good move for our

service centre.

As the minister highlighted, with the design of our latest, Belconnen, we did a community partnership workshop that included Dementia Australia, and it scored extremely highly in the assessment that they completed. I think that has proven our commitment in that space.

MS ORR: That all sounds really good. When you say that there is ongoing training and a commitment there, can you elaborate on what that actually looks like? What are the actions that you are taking to see that that commitment continues beyond the physical shape of the building?

Mr Neiberding: We have actually partnered, once again, with Dementia Australia to deliver training which they refer to as “supporting your customers living with dementia”. It covers the basics of how to deliver our customer interaction for customers that have dementia, and what we can do better in that space. We have committed to having all the staff in our existing cohort trained through that training course by June. As staff come on, we will make it part of our standard training program.

MS ORR: Have you had a look at any other avenues for accessibility that you could be realising? Dementia is obviously one aspect where people find barriers to accessibility, but there are quite a few, and they are always a little bit different and a little bit nuanced. Has any consideration been given to expanding the work that is going on in making Access Canberra areas more accessible to more people?

Mr Neiberding: This highlights some opportunities for us for areas of focus. As I said, a lot of the areas that this touches on, and the framework, can assist those with other disabilities. For example, dementia has a required quiet space area; that also helps people on the spectrum. It really feeds off that. We are looking at this as our base point, and what we can do to further improve. But we are doing exceptionally well at the moment; I think it is worth noting that.

MS ORR: What are you doing to publicise or make it known to people that this additional training and these additional accessibility factors are being provided, so that people know that it is there and have a level of comfort in accessing the services?

Mr Neiberding: We are still working through the communication program. We have done a review of our website and updated the information on accessibility and how to access a service centre—where the nearest accessible parking spots are, the best routes and those sort of things. There is still some improvement work that we are working through in that space.

MR DAVIS: Minister, we have heard a lot about the government’s financial supports for business, including the business support grants where we have partnered with the commonwealth. Has any work been done to tally and total the cost to the ACT government of providing business supports through the pandemic? I mean not just the cash that we put directly into the bank accounts of business, but the cost to the government for seconded public servants, for the additional administrative work that was required, so that we can get a better picture of how much this period has cost us.

Ms Cheyne: I will start; then I will hand over to Ms Arthy and her team, who will be able to give a bit of extra detail here. This does technically fall into the Chief Minister's portfolio, the earlier session that you had today, but because we have some officials here and it does cross over a bit into my work, I am very happy to give you as much information as we can.

To date, the ACT government has provided over \$475 million in assistance to support our local businesses. As you rightly noted, this includes wide-ranging initiatives like the business support grants and the small business hardship scheme. If I can give a quick plug, that is still open, until tomorrow, if members could please get that word out there.

We have also had particularly targeted supports for our sectors that have been impacted more harshly or impacted outside the particular lockdowns that we have been through. That includes the Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator Support Program; Amp It Up!; and waivers of and reductions in a wide range of government fees and charges. That all feeds into that \$475 million figure.

In terms of administration costs and the secondment of staff, you heard before from the Better Regulation Taskforce. As one example, they were taken offline for a few months during lockdown to support the commercial tenancies agreement work and some other things there. Where costs were shifted around, that certainly did have an impact that we recognise.

With respect to calculating all of those costs of public servants moving around and supporting different areas, I do not think we would have that to hand, but I will check. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible work of the Access Canberra teams. Where there has been a bit of a staffing surge, there has been extra funding supplied for our compliance officers, for example, who are playing that support role in the face-to-face engagement with businesses; as well as our contact centre staff, who have experienced particular surges, especially when there are changes to restrictions, and especially when there are changes to restrictions interstate.

I might check with Ms Arthy and her team as to whether there is some further detail that can be added.

Ms Arthy: The minister has covered the broad range of assistance that has been provided to the business community. We can provide an update on the specific costs in relation to business support grants and the small business hardship scheme.

As the minister said, during the COVID response, certainly, within economic development we reallocated quite a few staff to work on business support grants because that was the most immediate problem and issue that we had to deal with. We have not tallied up that cost. Whether there is something across the government, we can go back and check.

MR DAVIS: Ms Arthy, was it just CMTEDD staff that were seconded to work on this business support grant program, or were you, for lack of a softer word, able to poach public servants from other directorates and other areas of government to do that

work?

Ms Arthy: We had support from across government, so we took a mixed model. The staffing went up and down, as the demand needed. We were able to bring in people from many parts of government—we were very grateful—and, to get some specialist financial skills, we also contracted KPMG.

MR DAVIS: I am happy for you to take this on notice: I would be interested in the total number of individual staff and the total number of hours spent by staff who would usually work in other areas of government who were asked to come and work on this project.

Ms Arthy: I am just trying to provide the number of staff. I will not be able to give you the number of hours, purely because we were operating seven days a week, multiple hours, and we had different teams at different times. It would take a lot of record keeping to get that together.

Ms Cheyne: It was not insignificant, Mr Davis. I can certainly support Ms Arthy in saying that the team did work around the clock, literally, in providing those support payments to businesses. It did fluctuate, so it would be a significant diversion to try and get that breakdown of hours for you. We can do the best we can in terms of overall staff, or perhaps at least the peak number of staff during that period.

Ms Arthy: Minister, I can do a quick overview now. When we first started, we had 163 staff allocated to the business support grants. Again, as the minister said, depending on what was happening, we went up and down. In November and December, that came down to 131. We are currently operating at around the 47 to 50 mark. That is a mix of mainly staff from economic development, augmented by the specialist financial skills of KPMG.

Early on, when we initially started, we had people from across CMTEDD. We had about 40 people from other areas of CMTEDD, including Access Canberra, CSD, EPSDD, TCCS, and Health. We had a lot of support from across the government to be able to pull this together.

MR DAVIS: Is there anyone currently, out of that 47 to 50 working on that project, who, under normal circumstances, would be working somewhere else, or are you working with the usual CMTEDD team at this point?

Ms Arthy: Right now, we have, I believe, four people—two people from somewhere else in CMTEDD, one person from Major Projects and one person from TCCS. That was current as of about three or four weeks ago; that may have changed as of today. As I said, we go up and down.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Davis, it was existing resources; they were still resources that were probably working on something else, given that the business support grants had to be stood up very quickly as a new program. They were in, generally, that business and innovation team, but some things may have had to be paused for them, or support may not have been kept at a pace for them to support that work.

MR DAVIS: Of course, that makes sense. Thank you, Minister.

THE CHAIR: With regard to the KPMG specialist work that occurred over this period, can you give me the cost to government of that piece of work? It was probably at a few different times.

Ms Arthy: Yes, there are a few different times. Can I take that on notice? I will see whether we can get it during the time for this meeting. As you can appreciate, because it is still ongoing, we may not have the final numbers. We can certainly give you an update about what we have.

THE CHAIR: So we currently have KPMG staff working now on business support for the ACT?

Ms Arthy: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you; take that one on notice. With that, could you give me the amount of KPMG staff that were contracted as well?

Ms Arthy: We did not contract staff; we contracted for a service. For example, around now we have access to 20 people in KPMG. That does not mean that they are necessarily working full time; it is just that we have access to them. KPMG have told us they have 20 people who are working on it. At the height, when we were going through all of the major elements of the business support grants, we were accessing up to 50 KPMG people from across the country, to help us get through all of the applications.

THE CHAIR: Great. If you could get us the cost, that would be awesome.

MR CAIN: I have a question about drone deliveries. We have seen media reports this week that drone delivery services will be expanding to new suburbs in the territory. I wonder if you could update the committee on the progress of the four recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism in 2019. That is my starting question.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Cain. I will refer to officials on this one but, yes, you are right. It was announced in late January or early February that it would be expanding its delivery to Kaleen and Giralang. It has also been operating for some time in Harrison, Crace, Palmerston, Franklin and Mitchell. You would recall that the Standing Committee on Economic and Development and Tourism's inquiry was back in 2019, following the trial that had occurred in Bonython.

Wing does not currently operate in Bonython; it is concentrated on those northern suburbs as I mentioned. At the time, the ACT government accepted the recommendations of the inquiry report, and we provided a comprehensive response in November of that year. Importantly, there have been considerable developments in drone technologies, including relating to size and sound, which are, as you would appreciate, related.

There have been considerable developments, as well, in their regulation and

management in Australia. The commonwealth government is the lead in terms of the regulation in this space. Notably, it published its national emerging aviation technologies policy statement in 2021. I can confirm that our Better Regulation Taskforce is a member of the national Drones Working Group. That is chaired—and rightly so, because the commonwealth is the lead—by its Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. So the task force has been actively engaging in that work and in the development of the drone regulation policy nationally. But to the specifics of your question, Mr Cain, I might see if Sam has anything further to add.

Mr Engele: I have some notes on three of the recommendations; I am just getting the last one pulled up. For the *Hansard*, I might read the recommendation and then provide an update, if that is helpful. Recommendation 1 was to increase the amount of information on the Access Canberra website about Wing operations. That was completed, so that information exists currently on the Access Canberra website.

The second recommendation was to provide information to the Australian Information Commissioner. Since that recommendation was accepted, as the minister mentioned, the commonwealth has stood up their drones working group. Through that drones working group, we engage with the commonwealth and the Information Commissioner. That is an avenue through which we can provide information to them, and we have engaged with them through that working group on privacy issues.

The third recommendation was to collaborate with Wing to establish an independent comparative survey of wildlife numbers and behaviour in a suburb prior to them following the commencement of drone delivery operations. On this one the government agreed to work with Wing, and we have been working with them. They employ a professional ornithology service, which monitors the impacts on wildlife, and we understand that they have undertaken those studies on bird life in Giralang and Kaleen, as part of their expansion. I do not have any other notes on the fourth recommendation. I will just see if you have got that on hand.

Dr Clapham: Yes, Sam and Minister, I can fill in on the last recommendation. The final recommendation was that the ACT government proactively engage with the commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development's review, drawing on the experience of the ACT community and drone delivery trials. That has been an ongoing engagement between the ACT and the Department of Infrastructure as they have moved to more fully embrace their role as the lead regulatory in ACT for drones. As the minister mentioned, the Better Regulation Taskforce represents the ACT on the national emerging aviation technologies working group and supports the commonwealth in the work to develop a whole range of frameworks and legislative and regulatory options for the management of drones, including regulatory impact statements on drone noise; the development of drones' rules and management systems; the development of infrastructure frameworks to assess the future infrastructure needs to support drone operations in Australia, including intersection with planning issues; and a significant piece of work on privacy which, of course, goes to one of the substantive recommendations of the committee at the time. That fourth recommendation is currently still being implemented as we continue that engagement with the commonwealth.

MR CAIN: Obviously, noise has been a reported issue for people close to these drone operations and deliveries, so with the regulatory review, is it the intention to increase the tolerance of noise nuisance? How are these issues to do with noise going to be effectively dealt with to the satisfaction of the residents in these suburbs?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, you might be interested to know that Wing is very alive to these concerns, and rolled out a new drone aircraft in May of last year which is significantly quieter than previous models. According to Wing—so you have to take their word for it—it almost halves the sound level experienced during overflight. It averages 43 decibels while flying, whereas a normal conversation is said to be around 60 decibels. So it is quieter than a conversation.

The noise has come down considerably since the first models that people experienced. Wing has also been very actively engaging with the community over a period of time, I understand. I will just check the numbers on this, but I believe that there has been only one or maybe two noise complaints in the last year or so, despite operating across a large number of suburbs, including during lockdown when you can imagine that there were more people at home and therefore more people who were likely to be impacted. In fact, Wing said that they had a very strong take-up of their operations during that time.

Secondly, Wing is very actively engaging with the Kaleen and Giralang communities, or at least attempting to. I believe it is hosting weekly engagement sessions with the community, largely out at Gwydir Square in Kaleen. Just this past weekend it held drone demonstrations at Kaleen sporting fields and also in Giralang. I can check where for you; I suspect they will do that again. It has certainly been our view, and I have communicated this quite strongly to Wing, that they undertake a serious approach of engagement with the community. This is also built into the commonwealth's requirements for Wing. Wing is able to operate in any suburb in the ACT in which it intends to commence operations, subject to its notifying the commonwealth department at least five days beforehand.

I think Wing is going above what it is required to do in terms of its engagement to ensure that there is community comfort with that. In terms of the regulation of noise, we think that a national approach to noise management is the optimal way forward. We have made a submission to the commonwealth's regulatory impact statement for proposed reforms to the relevant commonwealth noise regulations. The commonwealth's preferred interim solution to drone noise regulation outlined in that statement involves a self-assessment process, where operators, in this case Wing, must self-assess their noise impact against location, as you mentioned, and frequency and noise output, among other things. We support this as an interim solution, but we think that there are some concerns with the application of a self-assessment approach. I have probably given you a more comprehensive answer than you were looking for.

MR CAIN: Thank you, Minister. No; it begs the question: are you relying purely on Wing's own reports on their consultation and their own assessments, without doing any regulatory checks at all?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, we are not responsible for the approvals of Wing. Those questions are directed best to the commonwealth department, as I mentioned.

MR CAIN: I am surprised that there is no active role by the ACT regulator, given that the drone is obviously flying over residential areas and delivering and dropping into residential locations. No ACT regulation connected to this operation is most concerning. Thank you, Chair.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, if you are concerned with this, you can write to Minister Joyce in the commonwealth government.

MR CAIN: I am speaking to you, Minister, as the local regulator. You are here to look after the interests of the local residents, and it would seem that you are just passing this off to the commonwealth or—

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Cain.

Ms Cheyne: No, Mr Cain.

MS ORR: Chair, I might jump over to my supplementary question, if that is okay.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, that is misrepresentation of the situation. It is not passing it off. You have not understood—

MR CAIN: It is very clearly what you have said, Minister.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Cain. I will proceed with my supplementary question.

MS ORR: Do I not get mine?

THE CHAIR: I figure that we all have one. Let's go in order. Minister, have any Kaleen or Giralang residents contacted your office directly about this?

Ms Cheyne: Not that I am aware of, Ms Castley. I have received an interim update by one of the managers of the consultation process at Wing, who said that so far they had had some good engagement at their drop-in sessions for the community, both by businesses—including some businesses who are keen to get involved—and residents.

THE CHAIR: Does Wing receive any financial benefits from the ACT government?

Ms Cheyne: Not that I am aware of. None that immediately comes to mind, but I will just check in with officials.

Dr Clapham: Minister, from CEMTEDD's perspective, there are no payments to Wing.

Ms Cheyne: Sorry, Ms Castley, I do not wish to mislead you. My office has let me know that we have received one direct representation to my office about the expansion of Wing.

THE CHAIR: Positive or negative?

Ms Cheyne: I do not have that, sorry, Ms Castley. If my office updates me again, I will let you know.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Orr.

MR CAIN: Perhaps that could be taken on notice, Chair.

Ms Cheyne: I am sure I can give it to you in the hearing, Mr Cain.

MS ORR: Minister, I was interested to know—and this may be one for the officials—about the environmental studies. I have had a few people ask me how that process is undertaken and if there is anywhere where they can access information about what the studies have found and how the ongoing monitoring is being handled.

Ms Cheyne: I do have that information somewhere, Ms Orr. Wing, as was touched on before, does have an area of ongoing work where they engage regarding the impact on wildlife. You might remember there was quite a bit of media coverage—I believe it was in September last year—where Wing had received reports of birds swooping on drones during nesting season.

I believe that, at the time, Wing engaged with its ornithologist for some specialist advice. At the same time, it temporarily paused its flights around the impacted parts of Harrison so that the behaviour could be observed. I understand that once those chicks had fledged, there was deemed to be no further risk to the birds or the drones. So drone deliveries resumed in December 2021. There may be challenges again. I believe Dr Clapham might have some more information about environmental studies and work that is ongoing there generally.

Dr Clapham: To be honest, there is not a huge amount of extra information to add to what the minister has said. An element that was missing when we went through the recommendations before, I guess, was to acknowledge that there was a fauna study conducted in 2018 by Wing. They continue to build on that through their engagement of an ornithologist as a part of their standard operating procedure for operations and for expansion into new areas.

I guess there is some detail I can add to the impacts on local ravens in Harrison. In September 2021 they advised that they were receiving reports. They undertook an assessment with their ornithologist. They paused flights and re-routed drone flights around those impacted parts of Harrison to allow the ornithologist to do that assessment and to ensure that there was no impact on that nesting raven. I am not sure if it was one raven or multiple; I assume it was one.

As you said, it resumed in December 2021, well after the raven chicks had fledged and it was deemed there was no further risk to the birds or to the drones. There is an anticipation that as we come into spring 2022, the same challenges may be faced. We continue to engage with Wing on their plans to assess those impacts and to manage them as we head into spring.

MS ORR: I would be particularly interested to know if you have any more information on the initial studies that go on. Obviously, there are ongoing studies in

the areas where they are already operating, but in the areas that they are expanding to, what sorts of environmental studies have been undertaken prior to the commencement of services, and how is that monitored? What measures might be put in place if there are any disruptions such as the raven strikes we are well aware of?

Ms Cheyne: Sure, Ms Orr, we will take that on notice. We might just need to engage with Wing on that. Could I just go back to two questions that I kind of took on notice?

MS ORR: While you are taking that on notice, can I also get you to advise the best ways for members of the community to find out about those ongoing environmental studies.

Ms Cheyne: Yes, we can certainly do that, Ms Orr. Ms Castley, I note that the one direct representation—there has just been the one in this period of engagement from Wing with Kaleen and Giralang residents—has been negative. And to Mr Cain’s question about noise requirements, which sit under the commonwealth Air Navigation (Aircraft Noise) Regulations 2018, the federal department has advised us that Wing is compliant with all noise requirements.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis, do you have a supplementary question?

MR DAVIS: Thank you, Ms Castley. I would hope to make them quick because I think we have spent a fair bit of time on drones. I just want to confirm this. Minister, you pretty clearly articulated that the regulatory situation is one that is administered by the federal government. I just want to understand, particularly in relation to Gungaharra grasslands and the Crace Grasslands Nature Reserve, which I understand Wing does fly over, whether they require ACT government permission to do that.

Ms Cheyne: It is a complex area of law, Mr Davis. Different jurisdictions are taking different approaches here. Wing does not require a licence to operate over the Canberra Nature Park, but we are continuing to engage with Wing and the commonwealth on this.

MR DAVIS: Great. I will go to my last question. Given that you have received one representation, it sounds as if some other members have received some representations. I have heard a lot from the Bonython community, for example, about their experience with drones. Could we not set up, within Access Canberra, for example, some sort of ACT government record of when people have feedback, positive and negative, to assist with those representations that you are making to the commonwealth? At the moment it seems as if all the records of the ACT community’s experiences with drones seem to sit in a compilation of MLAs’ inboxes and not in one more authoritative place.

Ms Cheyne: It is complex here, Mr Davis, in terms of, in essence, what the ACT government then would be doing with it. Perhaps we could be sharing that with the commonwealth and with Wing; but, as I mentioned, the commonwealth has given Wing approval to operate in any Canberra suburb, so long as it notifies the commonwealth five days before commencing operations.

So that has already been decided. But I think that Wing does take its feedback very

seriously. That is certainly what they have been communicating to me. I would be very happy to direct people how to get in contact with Wing. We can provide that to the committee if they want to share that feedback, because Wing is best placed to respond, take that feedback on board and alter how they might be responding. Certainly, they need to let the commonwealth know about how they have engaged with the community before commencing those operations. So the commonwealth will probably be looking at what Wing provides to them. But, Mr Davis, we might just take that offline. I will take it as a question on notice and come back to you more formally on that.

MR DAVIS: I appreciate that, thank you. Thanks, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Mr Parton, do you have a substantive question?

MR PARTON: Yes. I have got a few to choose from and I might start with this one: housing tenancy management, page 50, table 12. At page 50, the Access Canberra section of the CMTEDD report says that 24,320 inquiries were received on housing tenancy management issues. I am just wondering: are these about private tenancies or are they public housing tenants as well?

Ms Cheyne: Thanks, Mr Parton. I will see if we have that level of detail to hand. That is page 63 of the PDF and page 50 of the actual document; is that right?

MR PARTON: Yes, I believe so. Further to that—whichever official is going to put themselves forward on that—what are the broad categories of topics that people are calling in relation to? Again, that seems like a lot of calls to me: 24,000.

Mr Pryce: I have read and understood the privilege statement. We will have to take that on notice to get the more granular detail, Mr Parton. While we receive the inquiry, often they are referred to Housing ACT to follow up with them.

MR PARTON: Yes. What I am hearing from that answer is that we are not talking about private tenancy issues; we are talking about public housing tenants. Is that what I should deduce from that response?

Mr Pryce: That is my understanding, Mr Parton. But, yes, I will have to get further detail.

MR PARTON: All right. If I could get any relevant detail of that on notice, I would appreciate it.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Parton, Mr Rynehart just jumped on the screen. I will just see if he intended to say anything.

Mr Rynehart: Thanks, Minister. At the high level, we have a service where we take the calls on behalf of Housing ACT. When a member of the community calls Housing ACT, they are actually answered by our contact centre. Those calls are wide and varied across the range of Housing ACT services, but they would be about the Housing ACT services, rather than private, generally.

MR PARTON: Okay.

THE CHAIR: Mr Rynehart, I need you to acknowledge the privilege statement.

Mr Rynehart: Apologies, Chair. I have read and understood the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: I am assuming that any analysis of those call logs is going to be done further down the line with Housing ACT, rather than with Access Canberra?

Mr Rynehart: Yes, essentially. We would have a record of what the call is about, but the outcome of it is more likely Housing ACT.

MR PARTON: Yes; all right.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Parton, if it assists, on the Housing ACT website it says to call the line for general inquiries, to lodge a rebate form or housing application, to book an appointment to visit the shopfront, or to log a maintenance request.

MR PARTON: Right. Thank you, Minister.

THE CHAIR: While we are on with Access Canberra, I would like to talk about digital transformation. Minister, do you plan to introduce electronic drivers licences?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Castley. This is a question that starts to fall into Minister Steel's portfolio, as Special Minister of State, and responsible for IT. It is something that is certainly a live consideration; but, equally, the government has a very large number of priority works in the digital space, not least the upgrade to Fix My Street, so I do not believe, at this stage, that it is a short-term option that we are pursuing.

THE CHAIR: Okay. From an Access Canberra perspective, that is not something you are going to pursue. Is it something you will leave with Minister Steel?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, I am very interested in it and keen to pursue it, but just in terms of existing priorities, I do not think that there is room for it in the mix at this point in time. At an official level, there might be some more conversation with Ms Konti.

THE CHAIR: It is like e-conveyancing. The ACT seems to be so far behind other states and territories on this. I am just wondering why.

Ms Cheyne: On e-conveyancing, Ms Castley, I am very pleased to let you know that that has now been officially launched. That occurred in early December. It followed an implementation period and testing, and there also were some negotiations with PEXA, which was the licensing agent for the first approved electronic lodgement network operator under those operating requirements. I am pleased to say that we are now up to speed with e-conveyancing. Like everything, we are a smaller jurisdiction, Ms Castley, and in terms of resources these things are impacted by capacity and time—and COVID has not helped the situation. But we certainly are there now with

e-conveyancing and we have had very good feedback on that so far.

THE CHAIR: The Chief Minister talks about us being a progressive city. I am disappointed, as many Canberrans are, that this is taking so long. When do you think you can prioritise this, especially with licences?

Ms Cheyne: I think that is a question that is perhaps better directed to Minister Steel, Ms Castley.

THE CHAIR: Right.

MS ORR: Minister, can you update us on the new Belconnen service centre and what it will provide that is different from the current service centre?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Ms Orr. We are very pleased to let you know that we have got the new Belconnen centre up and running. It was intended to be formally opened in early January. That was delayed until just last week. I was very pleased to be able to join the staff there for a morning tea.

It has been very important for us to provide a Belconnen service centre that is fit for purpose. It was the last of our service centres to be upgraded—or moved, in fact, next door to a much larger space. The previous space was 30 years old. It does have an increase in available service counters and a large increase in our digital service kiosks as well. It has been designed with COVID in mind, so all counters and all of the self-serve kiosks are physically distanced. That ensures that operations can continue while remaining COVID-safe. Whether we have got restrictions or not, we can have quite a lot of people through there.

That opened on 17 January, with a soft opening, which meant we were able to see a large number of people through that centre, noting that our overall service offering at that time was just Belconnen and Tuggeranong, due to workforce pressures. It is very visible as well. It has got very strong branding. We have worked very closely with Scott Saddler on it, in terms of ensuring that there is a real focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition and acknowledgement. There is a fantastic artwork just inside the doors.

Also, the Belconnen service centre was, I believe, the first place where we trialed mobile queuing, which is now being rolled out across all of our service centres. That means that if there are some longer wait times, people do not need to stand in a queue. They can scan a QR code and walk away, and then they will get a message when it is their time to come back. I might just see if Craig, again, has anything further to add about what the customer experience is like there, and perhaps what some of the feedback has been like since we opened.

Mr Neiberding: Thank you, Minister. You covered that really well, being your electorate. Belconnen is, as the minister indicated, a lot larger than the other centre. It is actually 50 per cent larger, so the customer waiting area can hold more customers inside the building, when we take into consideration capacity requirements. We are able to operate all 10 physical counters, whereas at the previous centre, under the restrictions and the 1.5 metre spacing, we could operate only seven. With our digital

footprint of the kiosk, we are able to operate eight, so it is a lot larger and free flowing.

We also did consultation with the community to see what elements they wanted to bring, and we tried to bring them in. A lot of the feedback we get, surprisingly, is actually about seating. So in this new centre we have got different height seats, wider seats, seats with handles—all of those sorts of considerations came in. From a community perspective, it is light, vibrant and has a lot more service offerings and counters available for faster service.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

MR CAIN: I think your official touched on this to a degree. How will you measure the benefits to the people of Belconnen in terms of the service outcomes of these new premises?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Cain. As already flagged, even with the considerable demand that we saw in January, the service centre is able to see more people. The experience overall is better, both for customers and for our staff, which was an incredibly important consideration. We do take surveys about the Access Canberra experience, including at our service centres.

When customers leave the service centre they have an opportunity to provide feedback. Also, at a general anecdotal level, we provide really strong customer service engagement from the outset, when someone attends a service centre. We have some outstanding concierge services, and security guards as well, who work to assist people to make sure that it is as smooth an experience as possible. I think ensuring that we have got a place that people find safe and comfortable is part of that. In terms of the metrics of measuring that, it is a little bit more difficult, but we are pleased with the feedback that we have had from the community so far.

MR CAIN: I am not sure why the metrics are difficult. Surely it is the turnaround time for particular categories of service requests? Surely there must be an objective way to evaluate the improved effectiveness of this fitted-out centre?

Ms Cheyne: I think that goes to what I was saying, Mr Cain, about that front end engagement that we have got, and that we are able to do it in a way that is safe and supportive of the community. When people arrive, they select what they are there for, and it is our concierge teams who engage with customers to ensure that they have all the information that they need at hand. If there is a bit of a longer wait, they guide them through the self-service kiosk, if that is something that they might be minded to do.

Having said that, there can be some transactions which are necessarily complex. Access Canberra operates in the order of more than 400 transactions, and customer satisfaction is not necessarily related to timeliness. Sometimes it can be about outcomes, so it can be a little bit more difficult to measure. I will check if Mr Pryce has anything further to add.

Mr Pryce: In addition to everything you have said, Minister, Mr Cain, we take the live feedback from customers on the pedestals, as they exit after their service

transaction. We normally get very high scores, often averaging, in the last financial year, 97 per cent on that. Some key metric indicators that we check actively throughout each day are: is there a queue, what are the wait times and what are the service times?

Since the new Belconnen service centre has come online, we have seen wait times reduce dramatically. During some of the impacts earlier this year we saw up to two-hour wait times. They are down now, averaging around 20 minutes or less, and getting down to 10 minutes at times. We are seeing that, once they are inside the service centre, it is basically 10 minutes to complete the transaction with the customer.

The mobile QR technology, which is quite innovative, we brought in at the end of last year, because of COVID, and have now rolled out across all of our service centres. It is getting very positive feedback because it means that, if there is a queue or a delay, people do not have to physically stand. They are able to do other things while they are waiting and then turn up at the service centre ready for their transaction when needed. That has been a really positive boost. The feedback, as I said, that I have been getting is that it is a bit of a game changer in how we have been able to support our customers as they come to get service at our service centres.

MR CAIN: Thank you for that. I understand the metric on waiting times, but surely you would have a metric to measure, for example, the processing of a licence renewal and whether there are ways to improve the efficiency of that?

Mr Pryce: We do have those metrics, and that is something that we are constantly reviewing across all our service transactions to look for efficiencies.

Ms Cheyne: Again, Mr Cain, that front end that I keep referring to, making sure that people have all the information that is needed to process the transaction, is probably the biggest indicator of whether we are going to have a fast transaction or not.

THE CHAIR: Can we get a copy of those metrics—how the team is measured and how those time frames are measured, per licence or the different elements—sent to the committee?

Mr Pryce: Yes, certainly. We can give you our performance indicators and the metrics that we have available, but if there was something specific—

THE CHAIR: I imagine they are all rolled up into one monthly report to the minister, or to government. I am just wondering if we can get a copy of that.

Mr Pryce: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR CAIN: Surveys were mentioned, a post-service exit survey. I notice, on page 141, volume 2, of the CMTEDD report, the KPI relating to the percentage of customers satisfied with Access Canberra and note the response from an independent survey of the Canberra community. Is every person who attends, contacts or engages with Access Canberra given the opportunity to respond to this survey?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Cain. I will hand to Ms McKinnon, who is the Chief Operating Officer, who can provide you with the level of detail you are after.

Ms McKinnon: I acknowledge that I have read and understood the privilege statement. The performance indicators are derived from a survey of around 600 people. Some of them are randomly selected to represent the profile of the ACT demographic, and some are—it is an unfortunate term—harvested when they are outside a service centre or a shopping centre, so we know what their perception is. The other thing we have is the pedestals, which Mr Pryce referred to. They are an immediate point of time as you walk out of a service centre: “How happy were you?” on a touchscreen. Unfortunately, we ceased them during COVID because we restricted all touchscreens. We are looking at reopening them. That is a source of data that is immediate and anybody who visits a service centre has the opportunity. The 600 are more statistically sampled to be a valid sample. Mr Cain, some of the harder metrics are about the number of services done, and the average time of service per staffing cohort at the particular centres. We can break that down and give that to you.

MR CAIN: Thank you.

Ms McKinnon: In the survey that we have done, the qualitative survey, our service centres receive the highest overall satisfaction of the three service channels, contact centres and online, and respondents cite the thing that they think would improve service. What makes them give a rating of “satisfied” or “very satisfied” is how polite the staff are. The fairness of staff in dealing with them is among the highest-rated drivers of satisfaction. Obviously, the wait times and more knowledgeable staff are things that are deciders in improving their satisfaction. We do work on them, for example, with the QR code.

MR CAIN: So you are saying that the annual independent survey is of 600 people.

Ms McKinnon: Yes.

MR CAIN: How many customers in that period would there be, approximately?

Ms McKinnon: I am sorry; I could take that on notice. I am not sure whether we pre-qualify, because it is business all through the three channels. We ask which channel you access Access Canberra through, whether it is a digital contact or a service centre. I would suggest that a high proportion of them would have interacted with Access Canberra over the three-month period that we are surveying them in.

MR CAIN: So you do not know what percentage would actually be those who present themselves in person?

Ms McKinnon: No. I would have to check on the question, the methodology. I can take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Cain, 500 are selected using random ACT telephone number

sampling. I am not sure that it then knocks people out, depending on whether they have or have not engaged with Access Canberra at that time of being sampled. We will check that level of detail for you, Mr Cain, and come back to you, on notice.

MR CAIN: Sorry, Minister, did you say 500? I thought it was 600.

Ms Cheyne: I did. It is 500 by telephone, Mr Cain, and there are 100 people who are passers-by, as Ms McKinnon outlined to you before.

MR DAVIS: I want to ask the minister about the parliamentary and governing agreement and, in particular, appendix 4, which speaks about cooperatives. I was pretty disappointed, reading through, to see that there were no new registrations for cooperatives in the ACT in the last financial year. I would be interested in getting the minister's perspective on what the government's ambition is for cooperatives and if there is any specific work happening that might be relevant in that space.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Davis. I believe you are referring to the Greens' part of the parliamentary and governing agreement. For *Hansard* and members' benefit, is it 11.1: "Allocate \$10 million interest free seed funding loans for turning businesses into cooperatives"?

MR DAVIS: That is right. Let me stress that, obviously, I know that that is a party policy of mine. I am interested in exploring not necessarily that initiative specifically but the government's ambition to promote and foster cooperatives within the business community and if there is any work happening in that space that might be relevant. No registrations of new cooperatives in this reporting period was, from my perspective, disappointing.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Davis. I do not have that level of detail. I think it is potentially straying into the Chief Minister's space. I will just check in with officials to see if we have that information in the room. If not, we can take that on notice.

Ms Arthy: Minister, we do not have that level of information. We do not tend to monitor different types of business entities, so I am not even sure whether we would have any source of information, whether we could get any meaningful answer for you, I am afraid. We can have a look. I will see if my officials back in the office can send me even a hint while we are on here. Just going through all the databases we have, I cannot think of where we would have anything. We do work on social enterprise which might end up in a cooperative venture, but I do not think we would have anything that is proactive, to be able to give you anything that is meaningful.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Davis, just to confirm, are you referring to table 17 in volume 1 about the registration types: "Community Industry and Traders Licensing"?

MR DAVIS: Absolutely. That is the one, yes.

Ms Cheyne: Okay. This might fall into Ms Cubin's space, given that this is a table regarding licensing and registration, so I will just check if she has anything there.

MR DAVIS: Just before Ms Cubin starts—sorry, Ms Cubin—my question is more that we know that there are no registrations, so I would be interested in getting a gauge from you, Minister, as the business and better regulation minister, what appetite, enthusiasm or policy direction are you leading to encourage the take-up of registration and licences by cooperatives, and has this in any way formed part of the Better Regulation Taskforce work?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Davis, it certainly has not been work that I have been leading, to be frank with you. I will confirm if it is being led anywhere else, but it has not been part of my agenda, nor the Better Regulation Taskforce's agenda. I am sorry to disappoint. We do have a broad remit and a large agenda of work there, but that has not been an area that I have been particularly pursuing.

MR DAVIS: Good to know. Thank you, Minister.

MR CAIN: I have a question regarding the issue of the working with vulnerable people card. I am aware of a constituent who was unable to volunteer over summer holidays due to a delay in getting her WWVP card, which she applied for in October last year. I believe she has just recently received it. Could you explain why a WWVP check takes so long?

Ms Cheyne: I cannot comment on a specific application and why a specific application may be taking time to finalise. I appreciate you have not provided those details either; so I think we will just keep this at the general level rather than the specifics.

My understanding is that new applicants are able to work whilst supervised, once they have submitted an application. There are a range of reasons why an application may take some time to be processed. We do have Mr Rynehart on call who is well placed to talk you through that information.

Mr Rynehart: There are a range of factors that may affect the time it takes to process a working with vulnerable people application. I will say, at the commencement, the primary function of the act is a protective mechanism to protect vulnerable people. We strive to process applications as quickly as we can, but we always consider the protective mechanism that exists under the registry scheme as the primary focus.

Ordinarily a new applicant can apply online. They then need to attend the service centre to verify their identity. That is because we need to undertake a criminal history check and, to do that, we need their identity verified firstly. That is a step. We are then dependent on the return of the criminal history information from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Organisation. That can take anywhere from almost immediately to an extended period of time. We are dependent purely on how long it takes them to respond.

Once we have received that information, depending on the circumstance of an application, we may issue the registration or we may move to a risk assessment, depending on whether we have any relevant information. Depending on whether we have any relevant information, that risk assessment can include either a high-level assessment or a lengthy investigation. Without talking about individuals or matters,

there are a range of reasons why it can take some time to process. We always strive to do the process quickly.

MR CAIN: What is the average wait time and how does that compare, for example, with New South Wales?

Mr Rynehart: I do not have a comparison with New South Wales. The schemes are actually quite different to each other. New South Wales has a working with children check; we have a working with vulnerable people check. The schemes function quite differently. I do not have the current wait times. I will have a look for those while I am speaking.

A new applicant can work under supervision once they have applied. A person who holds a registration, as long as they apply for renewal prior to the expiry of their registration, they are deemed registered until such time as we make a further decision. That means that, as long as a person who holds a card applies before the card expires, they can continue to provide the services that they are registered for until a decision is made by the delegate. There is no adverse impact to the individuals.

We have been working through a range of processes, particularly during the last two years, in order to ensure that people can continue to provide their services. There was an extension of all registrations that occurred in 2020. All people who are registered were automatically extended during the first 12 months or so of the response to the pandemic. We have also undertaken various other responses during the lockdown last year to ensure that we could continue to provide services while the ACT was in lockdown. If a person has been seeing some delays, there are some lags that have come from the lockdown period and the service and the impact on the community that occurred.

We are working to process as quickly as we can and to get them out once we are satisfied of the risk assessment.

MR CAIN: On page 49 of the report you refer to implementing significant amendments regarding the act. Can you detail what the amendments are or are planned to be? Are they significant, and what impact will they have?

Mr Rynehart: They certainly are significant. One of the most significant changes that are currently being implemented is that the scheme has been expanded to include disability, working with people with disabilities. The ACT already had a disability services provision under its working with vulnerable people check but we are aligning with the national NDIS worker-screening system.

In the ACT that means that a person needs to hold only one registration to work with children, vulnerable people or people with disabilities. In other jurisdictions that person would need to hold more than one registration. We have put it into a single process and a single registration. That is one change that has come through. We are in the process of transitioning all people who require the working with vulnerable people disability section into that, which is in process.

One of the other major reforms that came through was to extend the registration

period from what was three years to now a five-year registration period. We are about halfway through that implementation. People who originally applied from the commencement of the scheme were issued a registration for three years and had to come back every three years to renew. It is now every five years. People who would renew today, their card would now not expire until 2027, which certainly means that they do not need to come back to us to continue to renew.

There are also a range of other administrative changes that occurred within the act which were primarily about shifting from what used to be a relevance test—all offences, all information was relevant to the commissioner—to now disqualification elements in the act, particularly around working with children and working with people with disability, which are consistent with national schemes.

As I indicated, we are in the process of implementing those and over the next 18 months to 24 months we will have finalised that transition of people, particularly from the three-year to the five-year registration and the NDIS scheme.

THE CHAIR: I am concerned. So that I understand, a brand new applicant who currently does not have a working with vulnerable people card puts their application in online and gets some kind of notification to say, “Thank you. Your application is going to be processed.” From that point, are they able to work under supervision in the vulnerable situation?

Mr Rynehart: As long as they are being supervised by a person with a registration, yes, they can. The ACT has a scheme which requires that, once you have applied, you have completed a form for that regulated activity, if another person who holds a registration is supervising your activity, you may work or perform that service prior to the registration being decided.

That is managed by each employer or agency, and that is a risk-management choice that they make at that point. But people can perform the function under supervision while the application is being considered. Existing registrants can continue to perform unrestricted activities while the registration renewal is being considered.

THE CHAIR: Do you have flags in the system for sex offenders and things like that so that, if they do register and manage to work supervised, they are flagged immediately and their application is withdrawn? Following on from that, do employers get notified? I imagine someone could be in a situation where they have put their application in—we do not know for whatever time frame; I did not quite understand how long it takes on average to get the application process through to completion—they could be working that whole time, knowing that they have been rejected, but the business owner, the employer, might not know. I am worried about this air gap there.

Mr Rynehart: Firstly, I will just cover off. Currently there is a 35 day average processing for applications. With your question relating to when a person applies, they provide an online application and the system says, “Thank you very much. Please come to the contact centre and provide your identity.” Once they have provided their identity, that is when an application is considered to have been received, rather than when they put it online. We cannot start the process until that occurs.

Once we send the information to the ACIC and we receive information such as you are describing—whether a person has been convicted or charged with what is called a category A offence—the commissioner has the power to issue what is referred to as an interim bar which prevents that person performing the function while the application is being considered. That gap is dealt with through that management. As soon as we become aware of that information, which ordinarily is within days of the application, not the extended period, we can issue an interim bar which stops the person performing that function until we process the application and make a decision.

We have access to information, criminal history information, and we have information which is shared nationally between the working with children sectors in particular, which came out of the royal commission. We also have other information available to the commissioner which is not criminal in nature but may be relevant to the decision.

There are ways for us to prevent a person who may be a risk working under supervision while the application is being decided. However, at the same time, that supervision requirement is there partly to manage that risk in any case. There are certainly a range of controls to deal with that risk.

THE CHAIR: Has anyone that is in this supervised working scenario had their cards rejected, had their applications rejected?

Mr Rynehart: Are you asking about people that we became aware of or how many refusals there have been overall?

THE CHAIR: Both actually. I am happy for you to take on notice the amount of refusals altogether or midway through the process they have had that card rejected. There is one further question going on from that. I know that you are extending from three years to five years. How do you become aware in that time whether or not someone needs their card revoked?

Mr Rynehart: Firstly, I will take on notice the total number of negative notices that have been issued under the scheme. I will say, at the general level, around 88 to 90 per cent of applications that come through require no further consideration. Most of those remaining are very low-level and minor issues. It is a very small number of people we are talking about. I am sorry, I have forgotten the second part of your question.

THE CHAIR: Any revoked over the three-year time which you are now extending to five—what checks and balances are in place?

Mr Rynehart: One of the main drivers for enabling that shift from a three-year to a five-year registration is that we now have daily data-matching available to us so that we can monitor registrants' behaviour throughout their registration. Previously we had point-in-time assessments, which is why the registration period would be shorter. We now have significant more information available and more contemporaneous information available to the commissioner. The registration period can be extended.

There are information sources where we can become aware of a registrant and we

commence what is called a revised risk assessment—effectively we notify the applicant that we are undertaking another risk assessment about their application—and, depending on the severity of the information, that may or may not impact the currency of their registration.

THE CHAIR: Just to be clear, the question on notice is: how many are rejected and, whilst working in this caretaker period, if that has been rejected over the time period, when you are aware of somebody? The last one is those rejections due to a criminal record. Finally, my question to you, Minister, is: are you happy that this is a complete process and that you are protecting Canberrans? You are happy, as the minister responsible, that this is working well?

Ms Cheyne: Yes. This is a policy change that came about in the last term of government following significant consultation across a large number of sectors, as Mr Rynehart pointed out. It is worth bringing us back to Mr Cain's original line of questioning about the time frames for processing. I do think that there is a balance to be struck here in terms of the limits that are in place while an application, or a registration, is going through the system but also ensuring that people who can work, and that workplace would like them to work, can do so under those supervised conditions. There are a considerable number of checks here, and those considerable number of checks that do happen in that time period, rather than at a point in time, is what has resulted in and is becoming a five-year period rather than a three-year period.

I think it is also important to note that different businesses and organisations can decide themselves to say that they want to employ someone who has a positive, confirmed, working with vulnerable people registration before taking them on. That is an additional check that an organisation may wish to make before employing someone. There are a range of measures here.

I do think Access Canberra has the balance right here and so far it has employed a number of internal processes to streamline things, noting that this is a new scheme that has had considerable impacts. I am not sure if Mr Rynehart did mention it but I think over 100,000 people have a working with vulnerable people check in Canberra. That is a lot, that is a significant proportion of our population.

All those things considered, and considering the lockdowns, I think that I am comfortable with where things are at here. But equally, if anyone has any concerns, any constituents have concerns on an individual basis, due to privacy reasons, and we cannot assist you directly, they are welcome to get in touch with us and we can put them through to the working with vulnerable people team.

MR PARTON: Let us go to the Building Services Centre. This is about Access Canberra regarding building regulations. I am at CMTEDD volume 1, page 49. That part of the annual report says that the Building Services Centre handled an additional 67,000 calls, which sounds like a hell of a lot. What was the total number of calls handled, or is that 67,000 the actual number of total calls handled by that centre?

Ms Cheyne: Sorry, could you just repeat the page? I think I missed it.

MR PARTON: I have got volume 1, page 49. In the paragraph about serving the

community, it says we have filled an additional 67,000 calls through our Building Services Centre.

Ms Cheyne: I have found it now. I will check in with officials as to what that is directly referring to.

Mr Pryce: I do not know if my Executive Branch Manager, Customer Coordination, has more detail on that.

Mr Neiberding: I will take that on notice for the clarifying details. However, that team did support our contact centre with the COVID support. It could be that they supported that line. We will take that on notice and come back with the exact detail of that line and what those reports related to.

MR PARTON: Based on your answer, I am not supposing that at this stage anyone can tell me what were the sorts of things that people were calling about on that line, how many of those were complaints? Additionally, when you consider the number of calls, what the average waiting time is before callers get through, because that just sounds very, very busy to me.

Ms Cheyne: We will take that question on notice, and if we have that detail while we are in this hearing, we will come back to it because I appreciate that you probably have some further follow-up questions there.

Mr Neiberding: Can I just add, under table 14, just to put it in perspective, with building services shopfront transactions, the numbers there are fairly high. It is a busy service centre but we will give you more detail on notice.

MR PARTON: The last thing to take on notice, unless you can answer me now, is: how many staff or FTEs are actually allocated to that service?

Ms Cheyne: We will take that on notice and come back to you.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of questions on one subject here. On page 20 of the report, there is talk of education sessions, and visits to businesses affected by public health directions—4½ thousand of these. Are these education sessions different to the targeted compliance inspections?

Ms Cheyne: Emily Springett will be able to go to the detail.

Ms Springett: I have read and understand the privilege statement. Through the COVID compliance, we undertake a number of different engagements with business. Some are pure compliance checks. Some are education-related activities; for example, when there was a change in restriction, we would have particular webinars and other activities that were often pinpointed—for the hospitality sector, the retail sector and gyms, for example, to provide them with targeted information directly around what it meant for them and how it could relate to their business. In terms of those particular figures, they relate more to that educative element. In terms of compliance checks overall, since the beginning of COVID, we have undertaken more than 22,000 of those.

THE CHAIR: How well attended were the webinars for the businesses to be educated?

Ms Springett: It would depend on the sector, and it would depend on the timing and the extent of the restriction lift. Depending on the comfort level at a particular point in time, the webinars would have various numbers of participants. What we always did, noting that businesses are incredibly busy, was to ensure that the webinars were recorded and placed on the business hub on the COVID-19 website, so that sectors could go back and watch them at their leisure. We would also cross-promote them through the business EDM that went out to different sectors, and through direct correspondence from Access Canberra to those business sectors.

THE CHAIR: Can I get numbers on businesses that attended the education sessions? Just to be clear, were you educating businesses on where the restrictions were up to and the ChooseCBR check-ins—that sort of stuff—or was this around business doing business during COVID?

Ms Springett: It would depend on when the different webinars were held. Some were very specific, after a restriction lift, and very much went into the detail around, “This is a change to the restriction; this is what it means. Here’s some ways and practical tips where you can come into compliance with this particular restriction.”

All of our efforts through the compliance work always had an element of providing information around supports available across government. It was never just one approach to our activity. We are very mindful that all of our engagements are multifaceted. They cover compliance, support, any government support available, to reduce the burden on business in terms of multiple visits.

Ms Cheyne: The webinar, of course, is not the only way that we are communicating the restriction changes to businesses. Whenever there are those restriction changes, Emily partners with the executive branch manager of the health protection service, and they issue a notice to businesses that puts that in writing to them as well. We appreciate that different people and different businesses want to engage with government in different ways. That is why there are different service offerings there.

THE CHAIR: Not just webinars; there were onsite sessions that people could attend. With the targeted compliance inspections, what justifies a targeted inspection? Was it people complaining from the community? Was it tip-offs? Why would you target businesses?

Ms Springett: Circling back first to the minister’s comment around the direct emails and engagement, that is correct; we have sent 244,000 direct emails to businesses advising them about what the restriction meant to them, since the beginning. In terms of what makes a targeted engagement or compliance check, we operate through a risk-based approach and we operate through an engage, educate and enforce framework. We also have a compliance engagement and enforcement framework which is publicly available on the Health website, which sets out our compliance approach when it comes to COVID.

There is a range of reasons that we might attend a particular business. One is if a restriction lift particularly impacted on a particular sector. For example, if there was a change primarily affecting hospitality through occupancy changes, we would go out to that particular sector to provide them with information, support and advice on how to calculate their occupancy et cetera.

We also perform a function if there are complaints against businesses. We will risk-assess those and attend particular businesses following that. Others are incidental engagements. If we are out doing some reactive checks in a particular area following complaints, we will call into other businesses. Our work is always data led and it is risk based. There are times when we would engage very closely with the office of the Chief Health Officer as well, around what particular areas of focus might need to be applied, based on what we were seeing in the community and based on restriction changes. There is a lot of data assessment that goes underneath how we target our resources when it comes to COVID compliance.

THE CHAIR: Just to be clear, my question taken on notice was about getting those figures for how many people attended the webinars in total.

MR CAIN: There is also mention of a further 619 investigations through targeted compliance programs. Is this a different category of targeting?

Ms Cheyne: 619 inspections, Mr Cain?

MR CAIN: Yes.

Ms Springett: Mr Cain, we are just trying to find where that figure is referenced.

Ms Cheyne: It is on page 52, Ms Springett; the third paragraph down. Mr Cain, while they are looking for it, and they can correct me if I am wrong, I believe the 4,500 figure relates to targeted compliance inspections regarding business compliance with the health directions—again, those restrictions that are in place for businesses—but then there would be targeted compliance programs for reasons outside the health restrictions, due to a particular type of business operation, for example, or perhaps relating to a particular event.

MR CAIN: What triggers those particular categories of investigations?

Mr Pryce: In a general sense, Mr Cain, as Ms Springett outlined, against our accountability commitment framework, it is based on risk, data or complaint.

MR CAIN: Risk, data or complaint: do you have a breakdown of whether they are coming from the community via a complaint or your own risk or data analysis?

Ms Springett: We can definitely provide you with the number of COVID-related complaints, as they related to business, throughout the period. We would be able to provide that. In terms of the proportion of inspections that we undertook and how it was determined, we would be able to provide that information as well.

MR CAIN: Just to clarify, these 619 are still COVID-related, related to the health

directions, or are they more general?

Ms Springett: They are more general in nature. Mr Rynehart will elaborate on that a bit further.

Mr Rynehart: That 619 breaks down into COVID program activities and the general fair trading program. The way that we target those is under our accountability commitment, which sets out a risk approach. Those 619, I believe, are more general programs that we undertook in the last financial year.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. We might move on.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, if it pleases the committee, or Mr Cain, we can provide that accountability commitment that guides that decision-making. It is a publicly available document but we can provide that to the committee, if it gives further context.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Minister; that would be helpful.

MS ORR: Minister, can you run me through the births, deaths and marriages, and how many people have taken up the opportunity to have organ donation noted on their death certificates?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Orr; I appreciate the line of questioning. As you know, it is of personal significance to me, given that it related to the private member's bill from the last Assembly. I want to acknowledge the fantastic work across two directorates, being CMTEDD, Access Canberra, and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

I am wearing my hats as both minister for better regulation and Minister for Human Rights in bringing forward this reform, which is the first of its kind in the country. It is very important for us to consider the ways in which organ donation can be recognised or through which a family may wish to choose to be recognised. Of course, there is the beautiful Gift of Life garden at the National Arboretum. There is also a remembrance day event that is held yearly which DonateLife ACT runs.

There has been considerable feedback from donor families that they would like to have that recognition represented in a more formal way. With that in mind, a bill was produced that allows for a family to elect to have the fact that their loved one was an organ and/or tissue donor to be included on their loved one's death certificate. That is entirely optional. It is up to the family, it is not time limited and it is free of charge. The registrar-general exercises his discretion for all of these, in waiving the fee. Even if a death certificate has been produced in the past, it can be reissued free of charge, to reflect this. In addition, families can also elect to receive a formal letter from the Chief Minister providing that recognition.

This was an important thing for us to provide and to lead. It came into effect in May last year. In that time, 10 families have exercised the option to have that included on their loved one's death certificate. Importantly, the take-up is telling, in some ways, in that, being the smallest jurisdiction, we do have low organ donation rates generally. It is between 10 and 20 a year. With 10 in 10 months, it is not as if we are looking to

reach a target here, by any means, because this is absolutely optional and up to the families, but it provides that extra layer of recognition that families can choose to pursue. So 10 is the figure that we are at.

MS ORR: Along the same lines of births, deaths and marriages, how many have been certified for early pregnancy loss certificates?

Ms Cheyne: This is something that, again, we were very keen to pursue. It was a collaborative effort between Access Canberra and JACS. I put on the record my sincere thanks to those teams. The availability of this option came into force for families who have had a pregnancy loss before 20 weeks. It came into force on 15 October, I believe, coinciding with the international early pregnancy loss remembrance day. In that time 223 people or families have received a commemorative certificate.

We worked very hard with local artists and artists around Australia to provide some options in terms of the certificates. By that, I mean the design and the artwork. It has been reasonably evenly split, and there are three general categories. For the flowers design, for lack of a better term, there have been 98 commemorative certificates; for the butterfly design, 81; and there is an Indigenous design, which is the same but it is in two different colours, and there have been 44 of those.

MR PARTON: I am looking at page 212, table 3 “Inspections/audits”—

Ms Cheyne: Which volume, Mr Parton? Volume 1?

MR PARTON: It is ACT construction operations in CMTEDD, from page 208 onwards; it is part of Access Canberra, I think.

Ms Cheyne: It is volume 1.

MR PARTON: Minister, when I bring compliance issues to your attention, which in some cases involve serious defects or a long list of neglected items allegedly caused by the builder, does Access Canberra create an incident record and investigate those to validate what the constituent has complained about?

Ms Cheyne: Similar to our compliance activities that Ms Springett was talking about before, Access Canberra does apply a risk-harm approach to regulation, including building compliance matters, to ensure that our resources are allocated to the most serious matters. You would be aware that we have a rapid regulatory response team. That undertakes preliminary assessments of complaints and, where required, undertakes an inspection of the relevant property, generally within five working days of receiving a complaint. I will go to Mr Lhuede for the detail on whether there is an incident report or something of the like that is created.

Mr Lhuede: I have read, acknowledge and understood the privilege statement. To answer your question, Mr Parton, we do create a record of complaints. Under the Building Act and the planning act there are quite specific processes that we have to carry out when we receive a complaint. When they are received, they are created as a complaint and they can also become a case as we work through that process.

As the minister correctly pointed out, the first point of reference and triage for us is our rapid regulatory response team. As I have mentioned in previous hearings, that was established around three years ago. It continues to be a really critical element of our initial assessment and the prioritisation of complaints. We have managed over the years to maintain that critical staff level in that team. It has been quite an interesting challenge because our complaints do mix a lot between building and planning, with about 420 building complaints and, in planning, around 870.

MR PARTON: Can I ask: as soon as one of those inquiries becomes officially a complaint, is it then a matter of course that it will be investigated, presumably by the rapid response team? Is it a fait accompli that that will occur?

Mr Lhuede: Yes, it is. They will initially come in to the complaints management team and that is where they are given allocation as planning or building. In some circumstances when they come in to the CMT, they will be dealt with at that point. A good example of those are probably some of the matters in the planning area, such as unclean blocks. Building-related complaints will come through to RRRT, and they will assess those complaints against the National Construction Code and the requirements of the Building Act. They will make an assessment at that point, and it may be to take regulatory action at that point—for example, a stop notice or a demerit—or it may be transferred to another section of our compliance and regulation team for a more complex investigation.

THE CHAIR: We have lost you, Mr Lhuede. Minister, are you able to finalise that answer?

Ms Cheyne: I cannot predict what Mr Lhuede was saying.

MR PARTON: No, and it is always tough, I am sure, to take up from Mr Lhuede, because he is right across the brief, isn't he? I am really pleased that I was able to introduce him into the hearing, even though it was late and we lost him midstream.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Parton, we will ensure that your lovely feedback gets passed on to Mr Lhuede.

Mr Lhuede: I have just become Mr Rynehart! I have stepped into his seat. My computer froze.

MR PARTON: I do not know whether you will have this in front of you, but I am wondering whether the data on page 212 at table 3, “Inspections/audits conducted in 2019-20 and 2020-21”, includes responses to complaints made by builders’ customers.

Mr Lhuede: I am looking at table 3 “Inspections/audits”. That is reflecting our proactive program as opposed to our responsive program. What you are looking at there—

MR PARTON: So it is completely different—

Mr Lhuede: is a different element. It is a proactive program around electrical,

plumbing and gas, and construction audit. So we have two branches.

MR PARTON: Mr Lhuede, while you are on a roll, likewise does any of the data on the following page, 213, at table 4 “Areas of focus, Construction Audit in 2020-21”, include audits made in response to complaints by aggrieved building customers?

Mr Lhuede: Yes, we are looking at the proactive components of our audit on that page as well, Mr Parton.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I have a question about the night-time economy, particularly page 145. It reveals that in April the directorate held a workshop to uncover regulatory barriers facing the night-time economy and entertainment sectors. The annual report states that the core issues, including around licensing, noise management and development applications, were identified through previous consultation processes and have been well known for several years. What is the point of the government holding workshops to uncover regulatory barriers when the core issues, as the report states, have been well known for several years?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Castley. I appreciate the opportunity to talk through this, and officials will be able to go to some of the detail that was uncovered during those forums. The report is right, in that the core issues, of course, are not unknown to us. It has been very useful to be able to tease out what the actual issues are. An issue for one sector is potentially a different issue for another—for example, noise. With noise, for a live music venue it could be that the noise thresholds are too low. For a resident nearby or a restaurant, perhaps, that might be operating near a live music venue, it could be that the noise threshold is too high.

That is a very basic example, but what I am getting at here is that we wanted to get the right people in the room and talking to each other, to uncover exactly what we meant by that. It is not as simple as knowing what each issue is and solving it; some are interrelated. Some also involve trade-offs, because, as I said, there are competing interests and objectives.

The challenge has been to try and find solutions that assist or benefit the welfare of all parties. Sam might have something further to add about what was uncovered during that forum.

Mr Engele: I have a small amount to add. It is really about the intersection of those different issues and the regulations that surround those; namely, noise, liquor licensing and fees, development approvals and building standards. It is about how all of those come together. There has already been work underway on a range of those different areas. We have been trying to take a more joined-up approach to look at it as a system, and that has been factored into the discovery report.

THE CHAIR: If there are issues identified that have been well known for several years, why haven't they been fixed? I think I understand some of the business community's frustration.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, I would suggest that you refer to the transcript, because I literally answered that.

THE CHAIR: In light of the time—

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, I did email you and the secretary of the committee. We have some responses to some of the questions that we took on notice. If the committee is willing—I am in your hands—we would be willing to take a little bit of extra time, if it assists you, noting that it can be more useful for committees to receive answers in a timely fashion, as in right now. But if you wish, we can respond in the usual fashion. We are together again in 15 minutes time, so I am happy to stay.

THE CHAIR: We do have one minute to go. I know that I need a quick break. I would like to add another question to be taken on notice from this session, if I can. Can I get a breakdown of the full final cost for the pilot of ChooseCBR and the full rollout?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, I have that information here. The figures that I have are that the total cost of ChooseCBR, including the redeemed vouchers, all of the ICT, the licence fees for the ChooseCBR system and the communications and marketing, was \$2,545,155.

THE CHAIR: That includes the pilot as well?

Ms Cheyne: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you, everybody, for your attendance today. There have been many questions taken on notice, so please provide those answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We will have a 15-minute break and return at 2.45 for session 4 to hear from Ms Cheyne in her capacity as Minister for the Arts.

Hearing suspended from 2.30 to 2.46 pm.

THE CHAIR: In this session we welcome back Ms Cheyne, Minister for the Arts and officials from CMTEDD. Can I remind witnesses—there are some new people in the room—of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Before you speak, please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

I will kick off with the first question. Minister, I refer to a recent *Canberra Times* article about a mural at Rabaul Lane. It was painted for the upcoming Surface Festival. The article states that the artist was told to redo the work after a complaint was made about the piece. Can you confirm to whom the complaint was made and who directed the artist to redo her work?

Ms Cheyne: This relates to the Surface Festival, which is a program by Transport Canberra and City Services. However, I do have some detail and I will do my best to answer this. If I make an error in the information I have or if there are further questions that you might have, we will have to take them on notice and seek some advice from Minister Steel.

The Surface Festival is an ambitious project that is being led by TCCS and was announced last year. It was due to be in November but has been moved to this weekend. We have seen a wide variety of graffiti artists who are enlivening our city spaces, particularly in Civic and in Braddon, but there are also a host of workshops and tours of street art as well.

The Surface Festival, as I understand it, did relate to walls which were ACT government owned or on publicly unleased land, or were owned and managed by a body corporate. In those cases there were negotiations that needed to occur with the wall owners, and they would have occurred with the production team which was procured by TCCS and those wall owners.

I need to confirm very firmly that the Surface Festival and the ACT government did not censor the artwork, as I understand it. The piece by the artist who is a renowned artist, and a fantastic one at that, is part of the Graffiti Paint Jam. My understanding is that there was a miscommunication with the production team and that resulted in her artwork being painted on a section of laneway that was owned by another building owner whom the negotiations had occurred with.

I believe that the executive committee managing that building where that laneway artwork was developed—it was not where it was intended to be in the first place—raised some concerns about the artwork, as they had been expecting on that site a traditional Aboriginal artwork piece. However, I understand that there were then further negotiations about the artwork in question, allowing it to remain till the end of the festival. I believe that this was communicated to the artist.

In the meantime, I understand that the artist made an independent decision to adapt the artwork—it has changed form—but I also understand that the executive committee that manages the building have now agreed that the mural can remain into the future.

As I said, if there is anything further that I need to add there, I can take it on notice. But that is the information I have to hand about that particular situation.

THE CHAIR: Just a clarifying question, it was about the content of the art that the complaint was made?

Ms Cheyne: I do not know if it was even a complaint. The information I have is that there were concerns because the artwork that was there was not the one they were expecting. It may not have even been about the content of the art or the message, just simply that they had been expecting a different artwork to be there.

MS ORR: Minister, can I get an update on the statement of intent and how it is progressing through its implementation?

Ms Cheyne: Do you mean the Statement of Ambition?

MS ORR: Yes, that one.

Ms Cheyne: As the committee would be aware, we were very pleased to announce the Statement of Ambition on 1 October last year, which coincided with the budget. It is publicly available online. There has been a considerable amount of work going on in the background, which the committee and the community, particularly the arts sector, will see and be part of—very firmly part of—imminently.

The Statement of Ambition, in its first phase of work, I suppose, was really to set the scene on some major pieces of work that we had ahead of us and that had necessarily been delayed due to COVID-19 but which very firmly formed the agenda for this calendar year. They are the new arts policy, as well as the new arts funding model.

These have been on the agenda since the last term of the Assembly but, as I mentioned, have been necessarily delayed. Having the Statement of Ambition and the strategies within which we want to achieve the ambition set the high-level framework of how we are going to go about that and really guides those discussions. The policy and the funding model is something that we are going to do in a real co-design process with the sector.

We are very pleased that we now have a new executive branch manager in Ms Caroline Fulton who is very well known to the ACT arts community and who will be leading that work. We are going to commence a very intense period of consultation, as I mentioned, imminently. I will see if Ms Fulton has anything further to add.

Ms Fulton: I have read and understood the privilege statement. I have been in the role for six weeks now and much of that time has been very focused in terms of delivering on the minister's statement of ambitions and priorities which is, of course, the arts policy and development of the funding model.

At this point in time I am putting together a program of consultation with the sector, which I expect to roll out imminently, and having targeted conversations with stakeholders, commencing this month. There will be a lot of activity and, as the minister said, a very intense period of time to do that. That may be on both the policy and the arts funding model, the new arts funding model.

MR DAVIS: Minister, I am interested in the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Obviously the 2020-21 budget allocated \$2 million for improvements there. I just wondered if you have a more timely update on how those works are progressing, where that is up to in the planning process.

Ms Cheyne: This was an election commitment and something that is in the parliamentary and governing agreement, as you flagged, and it is something that is very important for us to do and get the funding secured through the budget process early in this term. That work is underway. I will defer to officials who can talk you through the level of detail.

Ms Fulton: The procurement is underway. ArtsACT has recently made contact with the Tuggeranong Arts Centre to start the process and will work closely with them on finalising the project scope. Delivery of the project is due to commence mid-2022 after the scope has been finalised. Works will include new lighting and sound systems, improvements to accessibility and any work health and safety measures that need to be put in place as well on the site.

MR DAVIS: Can I ask how much, if at all, is the work, particularly on accessibility to the building, connected to the work that TCCS is doing on the revitalisation of the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore? Accessibility, particularly from the rear of the building, is what I understand anecdotally to be a little troubling. I just want to see if those processes are sinking in.

Ms Fulton: My understanding is that the \$2 million is for the theatre upgrade. I do not have too much information on the linkages to accessibility to the centre. I might see if my colleague in the other room, Ms Libby Gordon, has anything to add to that.

MR DAVIS: Probably just to clarify, does that mean that the \$2 million will be invested inside the building and inside its current footprint?

Ms Fulton: That is my understanding. There might be some issues with things, but if there is anything different I will come back on this question.

Ms Cheyne: That was the policy intent of that commitment, for it really to be about the accessibility and the changes, particularly inside, to do with the theatre. However, if there are opportunities within that envelope, without taking away from the theatre, to engage with TCCS, we will. I suspect that those are two discrete projects. If they are not, we will come back to the committee and correct the record.

MR DAVIS: Minister, I know just yesterday that the Tuggeranong Arts Centre started to advertise for the position of Chief Executive Officer. There has been a change of leadership at the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Has artsACT been in contact with the board and do we have a bit of a plan for how that change of leadership might impact the works happening there?

Ms Cheyne: I actually met with the Chair of the Tuggeranong Community Arts Association last week, or the week before—very recently in the last few weeks—as well as the acting CEO. There has been an acting CEO in place for some months now. With that in mind, I think we can all take away from that that things have been going

quite smoothly for the organisation during this transition period. They have now got to a point where they are ready to advertise. Yes, artsACT has assisted in promoting that opportunity.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned upgrades to the lighting, sound, accessibility and work health and safety issues at Tuggeranong Arts Centre. Was there also an intention to replace the seating in the theatre?

Ms Cheyne: I do not believe that it extended that far, Ms Lawder, but I will check for you and come back to you on notice.

Ms Fulton: It may do, in conversations with Tuggeranong Arts Centre, in terms of what is able to be done within the scope and within the budget. Where there can be improvements to the theatre and within the scope of the budget, that will be undertaken.

MS LAWDER: With the Amp It Up! fund, could you explain to me the process for choosing recipients of the grants? With the funding recipients, what sort of criteria were involved?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Ms Lawder, I can do that. This is technically in another portfolio. The way that Amp It Up! came about, as you know, was through conversations with the live performance community, both artists and venues, who were really seeing the impacts of the uncertainty from 2020 and early 2021. First of all, there was the lockdown; then states went through that summer of opening and shutting borders. It was really having a large impact on confidence, in terms of touring and in terms of the opportunities provided to artists.

First of all, criteria were developed, in coordination with MusicACT, as I recall; then that was advertised. There was a community consultation session held at the Street Theatre. The closing date was within two or three weeks, just noting that we did want to get the funding secured and out the door for those live performance venues, to give them that certainty and confidence before the end of the financial year. I believe it occurred in May 2021, but it might have been June.

An assessment panel was convened. It was an independent assessment panel. That assessment panel recommended 23 applications for funding. The original announcement that we made was for a funding envelope of \$750,000. In providing the recommendations of those 23 applications to me, the directorate noted that only 19 of the 23 venues that had been recommended for funding would be able to be captured within that \$750,000 envelope.

I had no role in determining the applications, the assessment or anything like that. But when I received that advice, I sought some further advice on whether there was a way in which all 23 applicants that had been successfully assessed could be funded, given that the principles associated with the program were really about viability. Having four of the 23 miss out because that funding envelope was not quite large enough just struck me as not in accordance with where we wanted to head.

On that question that I raised with officials, they went back and had a further look,

and were able to identify some additional funds. Again, I remind you that this was close to the end of the financial year, so the funding envelope was able to be increased to \$790,000, and officials further proposed a method whereby all 23 applications that had been recommended for funding could be funded, and I agreed to that and signed that off.

MS LAWDER: Will there be another round? Also, given the lockdown last year, was there an extension of time given for people to be able to expend the funding?

Ms Cheyne: Yes and yes are the answers to that, Ms Lawder. I will do them in reverse order. The funding was expected to have been acquitted by those live performance venues by November 2021. Of course, we had a three-month lockdown. As a result we did extend that until initially the end of February, but there are still some venues that have not been able to expend all of that. As we know, live music venues have been particularly impacted due to community confidence, even while their doors have been opened. Just on Sunday, I went to a gig that had been supported by Amp It Up!, so that money is still going out the door, and the program was designed to be flexible. In terms of another round?

MS LAWDER: Yes.

Ms Cheyne: We announced, towards the end of January, following further consultation with the sector, another \$500,000 round of Amp It Up! to be delivered later this year—again, timing-wise, when the confidence has picked up a bit. Of course, we are starting to see that really positive uptick right now; certainly, it is to take advantage of where we might be heading as a community. We will take this opportunity to have a look at the guidelines and whether there are any tweaks needed, again in consultation with the community and feedback that we have had both from performers and from live music venues. Overall, I am pleased with how it has fulfilled its aims in terms of its flexibility.

THE CHAIR: With the consultation process, you said there was a short time frame; I understand that. How did the venues find out about it? Of the live music venues around town, 23 is not many. How did you notify them that this was up for grabs?

Ms Cheyne: That is 23 successful venues, not the total number of those who applied. I can get the total number who applied, if you like.

THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

Ms Cheyne: It was 23 that had been assessed as recommended for funding. We did work very closely with MusicACT in promoting it. ArtsACT also has a weekly newsletter, and it was heavily promoted through that. There was a very big launch of the program. That was held at Smith's Alternative. It had a very big turnout from live music venues and artists. There was that consultation or community Q & A event that was held at the Street Theatre. In terms of awareness of the program, and given its short time frame, I had no issues with the spread of venues that did apply. As you will note, there was a real spread of venues that were successful as well.

THE CHAIR: With regard to the assessment panel—I am happy for you to take this

on notice—can we get the list of members that were on that panel?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, Ms Castley. There was a representative of MusicACT and there were two others.

Ms Fulton: A representative of artsACT and VisitCanberra were on the panel. To address your question about how many applied, there were 35 applications to the program.

THE CHAIR: Are we able to get the list of all of those 35?

Ms Fulton: We tend never to publish unsuccessful applicants, in terms of confidentiality. We tend to publish only those that are successful.

THE CHAIR: The funding was \$790,000 last time; will the funding be expanded, with more cash? Will you widen the scope of businesses that are eligible to take part?

Ms Cheyne: The funding announcement is \$500,000 and that is publicly available. In terms of the scope, as I mentioned, we are very happy to take feedback from venues and performers. We would be grateful for the committee's assistance in providing us with that feedback, as we look at the scheme's design and scope.

THE CHAIR: I think there is a dancing venue that was very keen; there is one that does live music and dancing that would be very excited to be part of it.

MS CLAY: Minister, I heard really good things about Amp It Up! In general, I think that was a really good program, but I did hear a desire from quite a lot of venues for a designated contact at Access Canberra that could help them to navigate maybe not the grant system but all of the restrictions and the changes—just to navigate that in a whole-of-government sense, as to what we do now.

I also heard of a real desire for a road map for the next wave of COVID. I understand exactly how difficult it is to provide that in a health-first operating environment. Have you had any thoughts about what we do for the next wave of COVID and whether you can have some designated contacts at Access Canberra to help our venues?

Ms Cheyne: Ms Clay, there were designated contacts within Health who worked closely with a range of venues, particularly regarding restrictions, as you mentioned, and checking density limits. I think everyone online is well aware that live performance venues in Canberra are not necessarily square or rectangular shapes, so calculating density can sometimes be a little bit challenging.

Sometimes when venues did engage with ACT Health we were able to increase the number of people that they were able to have inside, simply due to assistance with that. If any venues do want to get in touch with ACT Health and have that one-on-one conversation about navigating those restrictions, we can certainly do that. We did talk in the previous hearing about webinars that we held with businesses on restrictions, and on tips and tricks regarding how to comply. That is widely promoted through our business newsletters as well. Again we can consider whether there are further meaningful ways in which we can engage.

In terms of a road map, I can certainly confirm—and Minister Stephen-Smith has said this publicly as well—that there is work underway in terms of modelling and planning for winter. I am very hopeful that it will be a bright winter, not a dark winter, but we have to consider all of the circumstances here. There are so many different variables here in terms of whether it is another wave of Omicron, and whether we will have a picked-up flu season, given that we have had virtually no flu season in the last two years. Also, there will be different variants; it is about how transmissible or serious those variants are going to be. All of those really play into the decisions that are made here. That is why, to go to the heart of your question, it is difficult to produce a road map.

I can certainly stress that the Chief Health Officer and all of the ACT Health team are very alive to the impacts on business, and particularly the sectors that have been hit really hard, like our live performance venues. They are often the last to have the restrictions lifted, and that is why we were really pleased to be able to lift things as soon as we could. We are also very alive to the fact that there is a lot of fatigue in the community—not just in the business community but in the community at large—about the lessening and easing of restrictions, and how hard that is to plan for.

These are all things that are front of mind, but they are not easy. If there is some sort of road map that we could produce, I think we would, but given that there are so many unknowns, it is very difficult for us to do that.

MS CLAY: Minister, I was recently reading *A New Approach*, the Myer work. Are you familiar with *A New Approach*, which has just come out?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, I have not read it in detail yet, Ms Castley. It is on my to-do list. I am not just saying that for the benefit of the committee. It was sent to me directly and I went to the Rupert Myer lecture, which touched on some things emerging from it. So I can probably speak to it in broad terms but perhaps not so much in the level of detail that you might like.

MS CLAY: No, that is okay; we will do broad terms. I was at the same lecture. The bit that leapt out at me was the OECD analysis that showed most OECD countries are spending 1.23 per cent of their total budget on arts. I really appreciate the transparency in your statement of ambition on funding. We had a little look at the ACT budget, and it looks like we are spending about 0.46 per cent of our budget on arts. The difference between 0.46 per cent and 1.23 per cent is pretty big. Of course, we looked at that and said, “Right, we need to double our arts budget!” Did you have any reaction to that? If there is a benchmark of one per cent or 1.2 per cent and we are not anywhere near that, how do you feel about that?

Ms Cheyne: I probably just need to look in a bit more detail about how it is being calculated across OECD countries and whether it is comparing like with like. I think, really, the feedback that we fed into what we published—and which we committed to keep updating—is about that direct dollar figure that goes into things. It does not necessarily capture administration costs or work in kind, or things like that. So I just need to check if we are comparing like with like on how things are calculated. I am not saying that that is an excuse, by any means, but I just need to confirm that for

myself.

It is also worth keeping in mind—and we have been talking about this very recently in terms of the funding model going forward and how we want to present data—that not all of our arts funding is captured under the arts heading. It might be captured under innovation, just like the Amp It Up fund is technically in another portfolio. Also, with respect to our cultural events, I suspect that we do not include our Major Events fund in the funding that we published along with the statement of ambition. Yet the committee would have heard the Chief Minister say earlier today that much of the Major Events funding goes towards our collecting institutions to hold those blockbuster exhibitions like the one that is at the National Museum at the moment, but also the ones that the National Portrait Gallery is going to host, and Shakespeare to Winehouse in the National Gallery and so on, which are all captured in arts and culture, and then the economic return from there.

So that is me, talking through the like with like and having to check that. So, yes, I think, Ms Clay, that is a good opportunity for us to have a look and see how we compare in terms of those calculations. I might reserve my comment about whether we need to grow or contract our budget depending on that, but I think we are all in agreement that in, arts funding, the return on investment is extraordinary. The Chief Minister himself said this morning that the economic return on cultural events is one of the greatest economic returns in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Great. My question is about page 71 of the annual report, volume 1. I note that Arts ACT did not meet its target for satisfaction with the management of grants administered by Arts ACT in the 2021 period. I am just wondering what changes, if any, have been made to improve the grants administering processes.

Ms Cheyne: Thanks, Ms Castley. Just give me a moment. I think the devil is in the detail on that page. First of all, the target was 80 per cent and the satisfaction rate was 78 per cent, so the difference in that target is relatively small. And it is important to note that we survey both people who are successful and people who are unsuccessful. I think it is worth flagging that the last three financial years have been a period where the arts sector has been hit very hard. We have done our level best to support the arts sector in a range of ways, including through additional grants funding, but the call on our grants funding has also been higher than ever before, so that has potentially impacted it. I do not think that one year makes a trend. It is something I will keep an eye on. We have also been wanting to make sure that the way of applying is as simple as possible.

That said, something that Ms Clay and I have spoken about before is that there is application fatigue. Having to apply for grants can be tiring. Some people really enjoy it and for other people it is like having to crack a code. So making sure that we are as available as possible to support people with that is front of mind. I am also considering—and this relates to the funding model as well—how we can better support artists through these processes. That said, we always say to artists, if they are considering applying for any of our grants, to give the team at Arts ACT a call and to discuss what their project or their application might be, because we can certainly help guide them through it. There is no intention that this is something that artists have to do or navigate alone. But if they choose to navigate it alone, we try to make it as clear

as possible.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Orr, do you have a substantive question?

MS ORR: Yes, I do. Minister, I note that the Cultural Facilities Corporation welcomed a total of 225,568 visitors and patrons to their facilities and programs in the 2020-21 year. How does that compare to pre-COVID numbers?

Ms Cheyne: Of course, our Cultural Facilities Corporation has been affected just like all arts organisations and artists. It has certainly had to bear the brunt of opening and closing and people not being able to stand and drink in a foyer for a period of time—all those different things. But there is a very positive story for the CFC going forward in terms of the recovery that we expect to make across all of its different parts, including CMAG, Historic Places and the Canberra Theatre. There is a particularly good news story out of the Lanyon Homestead, which I feel does not get enough attention for just how much bang it gets for its buck. I might introduce the Cultural Facilities Corporation CEO, Mr Ramsay, who will be able to talk through those figures and perhaps some of the successes that we are hoping to draw on in the coming year.

Mr Ramsay: I am Gordon Ramsay, the Chief Executive Officer of the Cultural Facilities Corporation. I have read and understood the privilege statement. Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Ms Orr, for the question. Obviously, some significant impacts have been taking place across the corporation and its various arms and in its various venues, because of the impact of COVID. The minister has indicated that one of the really good news stories is in relation to the ACT Historic Places down at Lanyon. I want to draw people's attention to the way that the Lanyon Homestead is making a particularly strong, positive recovery coming out of the COVID lockdown. Members may well be aware that it won the Tripadvisor travellers' choice award for 2021. It was also ranked the eighth best site or landmark in Canberra on Tripadvisor, and it was nominated for the Canberra Region Tourism Award's Out in Canberra people's choice for 2021.

One of the very positive things that has come from the work and the recovery, in this case based at Lanyon, is the work that has been going on to activate the homestead with a range of other activities. One of the very positive ones has been working collaboratively with Tim the Yowie Man, with the Legends of Lanyon tour. We are finding that the tours that are being released are being grabbed very quickly by members of the public, which indicates to us that people are very keen to be out and about getting to the different facilities and different possibilities that there are across Canberra, including some bush tucker talks with Adam Shipp at Mugga Mugga Cottage. The next thing that will be coming along with Historic Places is the Harvest Day Out in April.

Obviously, there were some significant impacts with the shutdown and the health restrictions that happened through the theatre, but at the same stage we also want to note that the Wharf Review, which was held in the window of opportunity between the different lockdowns and restriction times, was received extremely positively by the people of Canberra. At the moment, it is a matter of working across the possibilities on how we can help build the momentum again. One of the ways that we

are building the momentum in CMAG is with the Raiders exhibition that is now open to the public. I encourage all of the members of the committee to wander across and have a look at the Raiders exhibition. There is also a textiles exhibition that will be opening there shortly.

I also flag for people that there is the launch of the Canberra Theatre Centre's season next week. I know a number of the people who are in the committee and the hearing today will be there. We look forward to welcoming you and announcing the season throughout 2022. Obviously, it has been partly impacted already through COVID lockdowns earlier this year, but we are making sure that we can continue to make available really high-quality performances, and make it as easy as possible for Canberra to enjoy the arts, the facilities and the culture that we have here.

MS ORR: That is great, thank you. I was just going to ask what the harvest festival is.

Mr Ramsay: So the harvest festival is an event that celebrates the gardens and the autumnal harvest at Lanyon Homestead. Obviously, one of the great things about Lanyon is the gardens around the homestead. It is in different parts of the working farm, but there is a wonderful area producing food. We are obviously exploring other ways of continuing to build on that. As I said, it is part of the ACT Heritage Festival, but we are working very closely as part of that Heritage Festival to highlight ideas and practices about sustainability. There are talks and workshops as part of that harvest festival. Again, I would certainly encourage members of the committee to come down to Lanyon on 30 April.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you very much. Thanks, chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR DAVIS: I will be there.

Ms Cheyne: See you there, Mr Davis.

THE CHAIR: Mr Davis, do you have a substantive question?

MR DAVIS: Indeed, I do. Minister, I want to ask you about the Entertainment Action Plan on pages 32 and 33 of the annual report. I notice that the action plan has commenced. Seven actions have been completed, including the case study of a trial entertainment area in the CBD and that options have been investigated for soundproofing venues. I just want an update on where this work is up to and if you have experienced any COVID-related delays in this work?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Davis, this work is led by Minister Gentleman with support from me in my capacity as Minister for Business and Minister for the Arts and the Minister for the Environment, so I do not have that level of detail with me at this stage, given it is led by his portfolio. I am happy to take it on notice.

MR DAVIS: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: In light of the time, Ms Lawder, do you have a two-minute question up

your sleeve?

MS LAWDER: Sure. I have a longer question, but I guess I will go straight to a very active part of it. It is about vandalism and graffiti on public artworks. I will put some of the detail on notice, but just to make it clear, I noticed this week that the big little man not far from here has been vandalised or graffitied. When was Arts ACT first made aware of this and when will it be rectified?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Lawder. It is an incredibly unfortunate experience in the city when artwork is vandalised. Quite recently the artwork in front of the Assembly appeared to have had something dropped on its foot, which ended up smashed. We had to spend a considerable amount of time rectifying that piece. That occurred at the start of this year. In terms of the detail of your question, I will see if officials have the answer for you at this moment.

Ms Fulton: I actually do not, Ms Lawder. I might have to take this one on notice. I am sorry, I do not have much more detail at this point in time.

MS LAWDER: No worries. I have a few questions about it, which I will put on notice.

Ms Fulton: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officials from CMTEDD for your attendance today. There have been a few questions taken on notice, so please provide those answers to the committee secretary within five working days. We will take a very brief suspension for a changeover of witnesses and return in a moment for session 5 to hear from Ms Cheyne, Assistant Minister for Economic Development. Thank you.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

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

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Triffitt, Mr Ross, Executive Branch Manager, Events ACT

Kobus, Mr Jonathan, Acting Executive Group Manager, Policy and Strategy

Balaretnaraja, Mr Ash, Executive Branch Manager, Business and Innovation

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I welcome back Ms Cheyne, Assistant Minister for Economic Development. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to that privilege statement. Before you speak, please give us your name and the capacity in which you appear today and confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

My first question today is about the ACT events fund. The description on page 147 says that the ACT events fund supported events in the 2021 calendar year. A significant number of events, obviously, were cancelled, and some of these events had received funding. With the ones that are postponed through to 2022, what happens to the funding that was allocated to a 2021 event if it is postponed through to 2022? Does that money go with them?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Castley. I will defer to Mr Triffitt in a moment and he can talk you through that, but, yes, you are right; there have been several events that needed to be cancelled. I think there was one major event, being the Big Canberra Bike Ride, that had to be cancelled, where almost all the funds for that had been expended because it was largely about marketing.

There are other events that have been postponed, and an example of that is SouthFest, which I know Mr Davis has particular interest in and support for. We have been taking a flexible and active role in working with event organisers so that if they do wish to hold that event on another date they can. We want a range of events right across our city, which our events calendar and our events fund very firmly reflects. Mr Triffitt can go to the detail of your question about the exact arrangements of the funding.

Mr Triffitt: Thank you, Minister. I have read and understand the privilege statement. Yes, exactly. What the minister said is correct: funds do stay with the event organiser. In the case where the events have been postponed, we have taken a very flexible approach to rescheduling those events. We have issued deeds of variation to those event organisers to allow them to reschedule the events into the future, at a time when there might be a more suitable environment to deliver them.

There are a couple of events that were forced to be cancelled, and the funds that they were provided with were acquitted against the expenses that related specifically to the grant. The Big Canberra Bike Ride is an example that the minister used where all of the money was spent in the period right up until the cancellation, the day before the

event, due to weather. So where the money has been used for the purpose that it has been granted, it is acquitted, but we have tried to remain as flexible as possible for those events that have been postponed, to allow them to be rescheduled into the future.

THE CHAIR: I guess what I am just trying to understand is: if an event was postponed and moved into 2022, are these events able to gain access to money and almost double the pot for that event for 2022, or will the funds be kept separate for different events?

Mr Triffitt: Yes, the funding is kept separate. Essentially, the funding is provided for the specific activity that they applied for, for the grant. If they apply for additional funding, they cannot be double dipping into the fund for the same event. It needs to be for a future event and it needs to be assessed on that basis as a standalone event, against the prerequisites of the fund.

THE CHAIR: It could prove to be a very busy 2022. I am looking forward to it. Excellent!

Mr Triffitt: We hope so.

Ms Cheyne: I think, Ms Castley—and please, Mr Triffitt, correct me if I am wrong—SouthFest might be one of those. I think it was successful in two consecutive years for funding, but it had to delay its event. It was due to have it in February this year, was not able to hold it but was then separately successful in last year’s funding round for an event to be held later this year. I suspect that the way this will transpire is that there will be two SouthFest events, but we will work closely with the organisers about that.

THE CHAIR: Can I just confirm that, for those events that were cancelled, within a week or a day, that money still went to those people to pay the vendors that had outlaid effort?

Ms Cheyne: Yes, for any of the costs that had been incurred, Ms Castley. We keep on referring to the Big Canberra Bike Ride, but it is a very good example. It was not cancelled due to COVID; it was cancelled because there was a downpour, an extraordinary weather event. As you can imagine, in terms of the actual costs of hosting the Big Canberra Bike Ride there was a bit of infrastructure but not a lot. For those vendors or whomever had been contracted to help with that, that would have been work forgone. But most of it really went into advertising, as Mr Triffitt said. They were hoping for an extraordinary turnout for this fantastic event, but the weather event meant that they were not able to go ahead. All of the funds, I believe, for that event were acquitted because they had spent it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS ORR: I just wanted to have a bit of a chat about Screen Canberra—how they have been recovering with the COVID restrictions, and looking at what work is underway to reinvigorate that industry and bring more productions to the ACT.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Ms Orr. We talk about it a lot, but I think it is worth referring again to *Blacklight*, which really did put Canberra firmly on the radar as a

city where it is easy to do business and host productions. If the committee has not seen it yet, *Blacklight*, starring Liam Neeson, has now been released. Screen Canberra hosted a viewing of it last Friday. Canberra features heavily in all of the chase scenes, including 220 London Circuit and the Legislative Assembly, which make several cameos.

That has certainly sparked a whole range of conversations. We also have an election commitment regarding a location incentive scheme. This is something that is common in other states, where we attract a production here by paying them to come. That is a \$500,000 scheme which we funded in the last 12 months, and that has enabled Screen Canberra to have some very positive conversations.

You are absolutely right that lockdown did affect things. Generally, given how resource intensive productions can be, right across the east coast it probably took a little bit longer for production to come back after restrictions eased, but we have seen a very good engagement across the ACT. *Total Control* continued to film scenes here last year, including at Parliament House, and there is a production that is being filmed out at Namadgi. I will check in with officials, who might have some further detail about what is happening here now that we might expect to see on the screen in the coming years.

Mr Kobus: Thank you, Minister. I have read and understand the privilege statement. As the minister has mentioned, Screen Canberra is delivering a range of programs that are providing benefit to the screen sector here in the ACT. *Blacklight* is a really good example—estimated \$2 million in economic impact and employing around 100 Canberrans through that production. Even though there were restrictions in place, it is probably one of those opportunities that came about because of the restrictions that were in place. A number of locations in Canberra had the advantage of being able to host the production here and they filmed several scenes in this city.

The screen investment fund provides \$5 million to support investment in screen activities. There is a bit over \$3 million still available in that fund, which is good news for how future investments might be applied. An element of the screen investment fund that is really important is a sub-program called Made in CBR, with a specific part of that budget set aside to support Canberra businesses and their ability to invest in activities that are focused on growing the screen industry here in the territory. There have been nine projects already funded out of that Made in CBR project, which helps to not only support those businesses to grow but employ other people in the screen sector here in the city.

Over the next period, a range of different projects have come to life through the screen investment fund. I think there are nine projects overall, in addition to the Made in CBR funds, that have been supported under the screen investment fund to date, and that is across screen features as well as TV series. *Total Control* is an example of one of those. The screen attraction fund was mentioned. There is \$500,000 for the screen attraction fund. That fund, as an example, will be used to leverage more opportunities like those that *Blacklight* provided.

The screen attraction fund did not have to be used for *Blacklight* specifically, but it is the type of thing that remains possible. I think one of the things that happens, as a

result of *Blacklight* being filmed here in the ACT, is that it does shine the spotlight on the ACT as a premier destination for major productions like that to be filmed, with a lot of location advantages and proximity to a whole range of features. As a really simple thing, some of the feedback from the *Blacklight* crew was that to be able to walk from the hotel to the place where they were filming was an advantage that I guess we take for granted here in the ACT, but it is not afforded to many other destinations around the world.

Ms Cheyne: Just one final point on the location incentive scheme, as I call it. It is the screen attraction fund; they are the same thing. Why it is so important for us to bring in these major productions is the job opportunities that they provide, as has been touched on. Apart from the thrill of seeing Canberra on the screen in *Blacklight*, watching the credits I think it was more than 140 jobs that were realised in the ACT as a result, including jobs relating to capability building, where Canberrans were hired as production assistants. That helps when the next production comes into town, because we will have that capability here, and so it will grow and grow. That is exactly why we have made the decision to invest in that way, and we really do see it as an economic development opportunity for our city.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

MS LAWDER: You were talking about the Made in CBR fund and that there were nine applications approved. Were there only nine applications in total? I am just wondering why not all of the \$250,000 in the fund was allocated.

Mr Kobus: I will just pass to my colleague, Ash Balaretnaraja, who might have some detail on the total number of applications received.

Mr Balaretnaraja: I do not have that information in front of me, but we can take that on notice and get that information to you, Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. I guess I am wondering what happened to the rest of the money in the fund, if it was not allocated. Will there be another round and will it perhaps roll over to the next round of the fund? If there were more than nine applicants, I presume—perhaps you could take it on notice—that other applicants did not quite meet the criteria and that is why the remainder of the funding was not allocated?

Mr Balaretnaraja: That could be a reason. But, yes, I will follow up on the specifics of that question.

Ms Cheyne: We will take all of that on notice, Ms Lawder, and get you that detail.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

MR DAVIS: Minister, this might sound anecdotal, but stay with me. I was speaking to a constituent the other day about an event that they went to—and by “went” I mean that they purchased a ticket and were able to watch it online. The event company that did that would not usually have put their event online and sold tickets, but for COVID. It was an incidental innovation of the times. I wonder what we are doing, as a

government, to collect anecdotal experiences of groups that are collecting money from the events fund, and otherwise being supported by the government, who have been able to make their events more accessible for a greater diversity of people and in turn make their events more profitable. First of all, are we collecting that kind of information and, if so, how do we think that that kind of information could help inform events funding, going forward?

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Mr Davis. I absolutely commend the sector for their innovative ways of being able to reach more audiences, to increase accessibility and really just to innovate full stop. It has been one of the silver linings of this terrible period. I am not sure that we would be collecting the data of events that have done that, beyond anecdotes, but there are a few that spring to mind. Something that I think where we would collect some data on would be the arts activities funding round, and maybe the event round as well. But let me finish my thought about arts activities funding, where I think we have supported organisations or artists who have been looking to upskill themselves in particular areas.

I would need to confirm if Liz Lea was a successful arts activities recipient or not. I know that she has been leading the way in increasing accessibility to her events—I guess this is a bit of a shout-out to her BOLD Festival, which launched last night and is being held over the next four days—in that a lot of the films relating to this dance festival are online. She, I believe, has undertaken some training in relation to accessibility, to be able to provide audio descriptors of what is happening on the screen for people who might have issues with eyesight. I think there have been some innovative approaches there. The arts activities funding certainly provides that, in terms of the capability building. I will just check with officials whether there have been any within the events fund in the last few years that have taken an approach in this way.

Mr Triffitt: Thank you, Minister. The BOLD Festival is a good example. It was funded through the ACT event fund. Through the grant acquittal process of the ACT event fund, we capture information on participation and the number of attendees, whether they be virtual or physical. That is one method where we would be capturing some of this information, but beyond the ACT event fund we are not widely capturing that across the whole sector.

MR DAVIS: Okay. Then can I just ask as a quick follow-up. If we have groups out in the community running events, arts providers et cetera, who do not have the money to make their event as accessible as they might want to with the necessary infrastructure—the ring lights, the recording equipment, the internet connection and all those sorts of things that I have heard anecdotally have helped to make their art and their events accessible during these times—how would the government be able to support them, if at all, for those kinds of specific costs?

Ms Cheyne: Mr Davis, certainly through the arts activities funding rounds. There are two different rounds. There is a round that is open all year for funding of up to \$5,000, and that sounds exactly like what we are talking about in terms of making an event more accessible or developing capability in that area. That is open all year round. I encourage people to again have that chat with the ArtsACT team, as we were talking about at the previous hearing. That is certainly the path that I would seek.

MR DAVIS: Tremendous. Thanks, Minister.

Ms Cheyne: My team has just confirmed for me that Ms Liz Lea, who I was talking about before, has received funding also through the HOMEFRONT round for technical skills to upgrade a business model to an online platform. So HOMEFRONT has been another way that people have been able to access that funding. In terms of what is open right now, it is arts activities funding.

THE CHAIR: Great; thank you. I have another question about the ACT events fund. On page 68 of the annual report it says that there was \$411,269 granted to 28 event organisers. However, the list of recipients on pages 147 and 148 shows 30 recipients. I am just wondering why these numbers are different. Is there something I have missed?

Ms Cheyne: I am just going to have a look. If officials are aware, I am very happy to hand over. It might be something we need to take on notice, Ms Castley.

Mr Triffitt: There might be two reasons for that. There might be two events listed from the same organisation—that is, 28 organisations and 30 events funded. But I will take that on notice and provide that information.

Ms Cheyne: It may also have been that the funding recipients in that table were the recipients for that round but the event itself may have been held in the calendar year and had that rollover that we were talking about before. We will double-check that for you, Ms Castley, and come back with an answer.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you.

MS ORR: Minister, I think we covered Amp It Up! in the last session, but it actually goes in this session, doesn't it?

Ms Cheyne: Technically, yes. I am happy to take any further questions you might have on it.

MS ORR: I just wanted to check to make sure. What I really want to get an idea of is how the second round of Amp It Up! has been functioning with the effects of the August lockdown. If there is anything you want to add to what we previously discussed, that would be good.

Ms Cheyne: Thanks, Ms Orr, I do not have a great deal to add. I think that we have learned from having a fund that was live and then having the lockdown that we hoped would not happen but had anticipated. Actually having gone through that, I think, has resulted in quite a lot of learnings for the whole community and for us as government about where that support is needed and where the community was calling for it. Because it is a program where the funding goes to the venues and the venues then pay the artists, perhaps the trickle-down effect to the artists may not have got there as quickly, simply because the venue did not have the artists in there to perform. There is a range of feedback that we have heard and that we are willing to take on board in considering what the second round will look like. But it is still in early stages. As we

chatted about before, the first round is in its concluding stages and we will work on the guidelines for the next round later this year.

MS ORR: Great. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question about manufacturing. I believe that is in this section.

Ms Cheyne: It is.

THE CHAIR: I note that there is a relatively high cost of labour in the ACT. Can this be overcome so that we can see more manufacturing established in Canberra? Is it something about the scarcity of appropriately zoned land? Is that one of the issues?

Ms Cheyne: Would you mind repeating the question, Ms Castley? Were you talking about labour costs?

THE CHAIR: Yes, labour costs. They are high in the ACT and I am wondering if that can be overcome so that we can see more manufacturing. I am wondering if it is zoning that might be a problem in establishing and allowing the manufacturing industry to grow. Can you talk about that and let me know your thoughts?

Ms Cheyne: I would not say that there is a correlation. I think that ensuring that we have a strong labour market and an attractive place to work does involve higher labour costs. It is a positive thing because it attracts people to Canberra and to those industries that we are looking to develop. We are seeing at the moment a real crossover in terms of our high-growth manufacturing industries in the advanced technology space. We are talking about things in cyberspace, as was discussed in the hearing this morning, but also manufacturing businesses that are supporting the defence industry. Necessarily, there is a requirement for space and growth there.

By way of an example, just last week I visited CEA Technologies, which is in Fyshwick. You may have seen it on the corner of Gladstone Street. It has that thing on the top, and a lot of people wonder what it is. It is a radar, as far as I am aware. It is an incredible company in terms of its manufacturing and advanced technologies growth in the ACT. It is expanding its footprint so that it is able to keep up with the demand there.

Ms Castley, to go to the heart of your question, I do not think that it is difficult to run a manufacturing business in the ACT. In fact, due to the investments that we have made and our unique position with the defence industry here, and with our universities here that have a really strong focus on engineering, we have a workforce that is building a real desire for growth here. That is certainly reflected in the number of businesses that we have had. So, to go right back to the start of your question, I do not think there is a correlation between labour costs and land or rates or anything like that. I think if businesses are paying people a good wage, that is great.

THE CHAIR: I am wondering if you have had any representations from businesses who were based in the ACT but have left for New South Wales due to the unavailability of suitable land for manufacturing?

Ms Cheyne: Certainly not that I can recall in my time in this position, Ms Castley. What is occurring at the moment is representations from businesses who are very keenly looking to set up shop in the ACT, or expand, because we are attractive, for the reasons that we described before. As to whether businesses have left—not that I am aware of.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS LAWDER: I wanted to follow up on a question about the ACT events fund. Page 147 says that it “supports events in the 2021 calendar year”. Some of the events that received funding for 2021 were cancelled due to COVID and postponed to 2022. So what happens with those events, the funding allocated for a 2021 event, if it is postponed to 2022? I think we talked about this with respect to SouthFest—about eligibility under the 2022 events fund. If they have been carried over to 2022 for COVID reasons and, notwithstanding the SouthFest example, want to have a second event in 2022, will they be eligible to apply?

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, we asked this question earlier.

MS LAWDER: As I said, I heard the example about SouthFest.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Lawder, we covered this right at the beginning, and then when you came on we covered it again. Ms Castley asked a similar question right at the beginning, just before you came on. We are happy to talk about it again, but the short answer is yes.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I have a question. I feel it may have been in the last session, but I am willing to give it a go if you will indulge me for a moment. It is about the Canberra Theatre Centre project.

Ms Cheyne: Ms Castley, the officials for that are largely Major Projects Canberra and ArtsACT. They are not here.

THE CHAIR: All right. I will put that one on notice for that group of people. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of the officials from CMTEDD, and Minister Cheyne, for your attendance today. There were a few questions taken on notice, so please provide those answers to the committee secretary within five days. We are now adjourned. Thank you.

Ms Cheyne: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, committee.

The committee adjourned at 4.03 pm.