



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

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Wednesday, 13 February 2013

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

National Arboretum Canberra

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (10.02): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) that the official opening of the National Arboretum Canberra on 1 February 2013 was a significant event in Canberra's cultural history;
- (b) that the Arboretum has added to the wide range of national attractions in the ACT; and
- (c) the Arboretum's value to the recreational amenity, cultural infrastructure and landscape of the ACT which will provide long term benefits for tourism and economic activity within the ACT; and

(2) acknowledges the efforts of all involved in the planning and development of the National Arboretum Canberra.

I begin by congratulating all those involved both in the development of the arboretum and in the successful open day held recently, which attracted thousands of Canberrans to the venue. The official opening on 1 February, followed by the community open day the next day, was a wonderful start to our centenary year. I had the great opportunity of attending the event. As the Chief Minister mentioned yesterday, the focus on children for the event was a wonderful experience for Canberrans. Also, I was very pleased to hear that one of the songs in the opening ceremony contained the names of all of the trees that have been planted in the arboretum since its inception, which is fantastic.

The arboretum is a wonderful addition to the exceptional range of national attractions on offer here in Canberra. It will be a place of enjoyment, recreation, research and learning. I am sure that everyone who has visited the site will agree that it offers spectacular views across Canberra, and one can only begin to imagine its beauty over the next few decades as the forests mature.

The arboretum features forests of Australian natives and various rare and endangered trees from Australia and around the world. The arboretum contains about 40,000 rare, threatened and symbolic trees from more than 100 different countries, as well as a range of facilities highlighted by the centre overlooking some of the best views in Canberra.

The arboretum is a place where trees are cultivated for conservation, scientific and educational study, display and preservation. The vision of the ACT government in establishing the National Arboretum Canberra is for it to become one of the great arboreta in the world. The aim is to provide a place for outstanding beauty of international standard and interest that is a destination and recreational resource for the local community and visitors to Canberra.

As we have heard, the National Arboretum Canberra will feature 100 forests of Australian natives and various rare and endangered trees from Australia and around the world. This concept redefines the meaning of a public arboretum for this 21st century. As it develops into the future it will become a significant recreational and educational asset, with an important role for sustainability, the protection of biodiversity and best practice in horticulture and water management.

Over 100 years ago, when Walter Burley Griffin designed Canberra, he envisaged, as part of the design, a continental arboretum, a place that would showcase iconic trees from all over the world. Burley Griffin's vision of a world of trees did not eventuate until late 2003, when the ACT government saw the opportunity to make the original vision a reality. The design competition, as you are all aware, was held in May 2005, with the announcement made and the winning entry proposing the hundred forests and the hundred accompanying gardens.

The official opening was a centrepiece of the centenary of Canberra celebrations. It provided the ACT government with an opportunity to recognise and thank all those involved—particularly the Australian government, for their generous grant of \$20 million towards key features within the arboretum. Those include the visitors centre, pavilion, children's play space, central valley, and interpretive program.

The arboretum is working closely with the Friends of the National Arboretum to host guided tours and assist with event and general volunteering tasks. More than 150 people have participated in the Friends of the National Arboretum training program.

Another group that has been involved in the arboretum is the STEP group, the Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park group. A number of years ago I was involved with them in planting right down on the north-western end of the arboretum. The STEP group was formed in 2002 with the aim of establishing a demonstration native garden, a conservation and educational resource, in the heart of Canberra. STEP is now established at the National Arboretum, as we have heard, in forest No 20. STEP has planned a microcosm of the vegetation typical of the southern tablelands region of New South Wales and the ACT, which complements the arboretum's mosaic of forest trees that are rare, endangered or have an ethno-botanical or symbolic value. Individuals, community groups, schools and others are welcome to visit or join this exciting program. Their website is www.step.asn.au.

Also at the arboretum we have the bonsai pavilion and the National Bonsai and Penjing Collection of Australia. It is a collection of some of the finest bonsai and penjing in Australia on permanent display. It has been functioning in its temporary home in Commonwealth Park since 2008. In that time, it has had over 320,000

visitors. The Japanese art of bonsai has spread all around the world and is now a familiar sight in many countries, including Australia. The influence of the lesser known Chinese art of penjing is also on show in many of the trees on show at that collection. Visitors to the arboretum can see some of the finest miniature trees produced by Australian artists. I had the opportunity to visit the bonsai display, noting that some of the trees there were over 100 years old. The trees are in a wide variety of styles, representing the individual artistic flair of their creators. Unlike most works of art, some of these have been passed on from artist to artist, and even from generation to generation.

There have been quite a few ceremonial plantings, and those plantings will continue. Forests are being allocated to ambassadors and foundations; the central valley spine is allocated to presidents, prime ministers and heads of state; and the central valley terrace is allocated to Australian icons in the field of sport, music, architecture, literature and so forth.

Some of the people who have already planted should be named. Her Excellency Ms Yingluck Shinawatra, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, planted on 28 May 2012. That was with our current Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher. They planted the red toon in the central valley of the National Arboretum. The Prime Minister's visit from Thailand coincided with the 60th anniversary of the bilateral relationship between our two countries. Another planting was by Gordon Darcy Lilo, the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, on Tuesday, 21 August 2012—again with our Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher.

When the bushfires affected the arboretum area, Stromlo forest, back in 2001 and 2003, it would have been hard to imagine that within 10 years the 250-hectare site would be transformed in the way it has been. I have got very fond memories of that site from my early rally years and early years with my children, barbecuing and picnicking in Stromlo forest.

With our changing seasons and the continuing evolution of the forest, people will get a new experience each time they visit the arboretum site. The arboretum will serve as an important cultural and horticultural landscape in Canberra. As we have heard, the concept of developing 100 forests over the 250 hectares is unique and will provide scientific, educational and recreational opportunities for Canberrans and visitors to our city for generations to come.

The site will quickly become Canberra's premier open space venue and attract visitors both nationally and internationally. Already we have seen several well-attended *Voices in the Forest* concerts. I had the pleasure of attending the last *Voices in the Forest* concert, sponsored by Village Building Co. That attracted a world-famous opera singer, Sumi Jo.

The amphitheatre where the *Voices in the Forest* concert was held will undoubtedly become a much-loved concert venue in Canberra due to the rock mountain formations which allow the sound to be naturally amplified. It makes it ideal for musical and theatre performances.

Activities for visitors in the arboretum include walking; school education programs; cafe and restaurant services; guided tours; bike riding; a visit to Australia's premier bonsai and penjing collection, which I was talking about; interactive interpretive experiences; and general leisure activities in an open space environment.

There are three main areas for events at the arboretum, including the village centre, a space for receptions, formal dinners, functions and ceremonies, catering for up to 500 guests; the pavilion, which provides a unique facility for wedding ceremonies, meetings, cocktail functions and dinners for approximately 120 guests; and the amphitheatre, which has the capacity to hold outdoor events for up to 4,000 people.

The arboretum will be a great revenue generator in future. Over time the aim is for the revenue generated by activities and events held there to cover the venue's operating costs, making it revenue neutral. It will create jobs and provide an economic boost as the trees mature and it becomes a tourist attraction in its own right.

The operational costs for the arboretum are funded through a combination of government appropriation, product sales, fee for service and lease and hire revenues. Most prices will be fixed, generally matching the prices of other competing institutions. However, we acknowledge that flexibility needs to be considered for larger functions and events, to allow better negotiations. Food and beverage prices will be set by the arboretum caterer, Ginger Catering, a famous catering institution here in the ACT. Charges for the hire of outdoor venues will be on a flat fee basis; other charges will vary depending on the day or time.

It is envisaged that in the next 12 months a detailed master plan will be developed that will set the future direction for the arboretum's living and built assets. The next 12 months will include consolidating existing infrastructure and landscape assets, delivering a capital works program to complete works that enhance and support the existing asset base and monitoring and managing visitors and their interaction with and use of the site.

I want to go back a bit to some of the formal plantings that I talked about earlier and discuss some of the people that have come and planted in that area. One of the important plantations in the arboretum was the cork oak plantation. We have had quite a bit of work done on those cork oaks as well as the formal plantings I talked about.

But the one I want to mention is the formal planting by our previous Chief Minister, Mr Jon Stanhope. On Saturday, 10 December 2011, the former Chief Minister joined our current Chief Minister, Katy Gallagher, in planting a kurrajong tree in the central valley of the National Arboretum. He was joined by Dr Kris Klugman, the national president of Civil Liberties Australia, and Charlotte Withers, who was born on 1 July 2004, the day the ACT government first brought the Human Rights Act into place. The kurrajong tree is known as the liberty tree, and was chosen as a significant acknowledgement of Mr Stanhope's role in establishing both the first human rights act in Australia and the National Arboretum.

Going back to the cork oaks for a couple of minutes, the site for the arboretum encompasses “Green Hills” to the north, where the historic plantations of cork oaks and Himalayan cedars provided forests as a framework for the young arboretum. The cork oak plantation was listed on the register of the national estate in 1981 and on the sites of significance register.

Cork oak has a special place in Canberra’s tree history. Commercial cork was formerly an essential component of life jackets, fishing nets and insulation equipment as well as having its traditional role for corks in bottles. Cork oaks were planted around early district properties, and corks dangling from the brims of the hats of jackaroos and swagmen typify outback Australia. It is great to see that cork oak plantation continue. Cork oak is essentially fire tolerant; the tree produces little litter in its plantations, the bark provides excellent heat protection for the trunk and the foliage is relatively inflammable. Walter Burley Griffin recognised the potential of the cork oak for Canberra’s dry climate and in 1916 sent a supply of acorns to Yarralumla Nursery for trial by Charles Weston. These were sourced from the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne and planted in October 1917 in that “Green Hills” area which is now known as the cork oak reserve.

Let me conclude. We have talked quite a bit about the arboretum. While the beauty of the arboretum is already apparent, its full magnificence will be realised only in the decades to come as these forests mature. I would like to congratulate all those involved in bringing this project to fruition, particularly the former Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, on his unwavering commitment to the project. Canberrans will thank him for his vision in the years and generations to come.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.18): I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion on today. I certainly know more about cork oak than I probably anticipated learning about, and many other trees that Mr Gentleman talked about.

The arboretum is an interesting dilemma, but ultimately it is there. There has been disagreement from the Canberra Liberals, for very good reason, over the building of the arboretum. But the reality is that we now have an arboretum. So the question is: what then is the position of the Canberra Liberals on the arboretum? It is that we remain committed to the decision that we had, that it was the wrong decision to be made by government, and I will go to those reasons shortly.

But recognising that the arboretum is there, recognising that it does have potential, recognising that in time it will be a great asset for the city, the Canberra Liberals will not be wreckers; the Canberra Liberals will not be standing in the way of the arboretum. What we will now be doing is supporting it because it is there and what we will be doing is making sure that the potential that it does have is realised through good, efficient and effective management and making sure that its value as a tourism asset is maximised.

Clearly, the reality is that politics is about priorities and politics is about decisions that have to be made. Often they are judgement calls and they are difficult. There are

things that we want and there are things that we need, and there will always be a debate about what those priorities are.

When I hear Mr Gentleman talking about how Jon Stanhope was up there planting a tree for human rights on Human Rights Day, in what is a \$67 million monument, and an icon to Jon Stanhope, it appears, for his Labor colleagues, I have to juxtapose that with some of the priorities of our community: the issues that people face that are well litigated in our health system; the problems that we heard yesterday, for example, with Taylor Primary School; the many footpaths that we have in our community that need addressing; the street tree program that is underfunded. As local members, I am sure that we are all aware of the many issues about which people come to us where there are greater priorities for need in our community.

So it was the wrong decision, but the decision has been made. It is much like what occurred with the Alexander Maconochie Centre. There was a debate and we argued at that time that the money should be spent in our health system. The government said that they needed a jail and there was a debate. That debate was had and there is now a jail. We recognise that and we see the problems in the ACT jail. We could argue backwards and forwards about whether it was the right decision or not, but ultimately it is now about getting on with the job and making sure that those assets, be it the jail or be it the arboretum, are managed to best effect, that they are managed effectively, that they are managed efficiently, for the best use by the people of the ACT.

As I said in my comments yesterday and as I will say consistently, as Zed Seselja has been saying consistently, and as the rest of the Liberal team have been saying consistently, we are very much focused on the needs of our constituents, the people of Canberra—what it is that people need out in the suburbs, be it in Tuggeranong, Belconnen, Gungahlin, Weston Creek, Woden or any other part of Canberra. That is where we are focused, and we are not ashamed of that. Unreservedly, that is our priority.

Sometimes that is not as glamorous perhaps as an arboretum. It is not as glamorous as public art but it is what the community wants. When I speak to people at shopping centres, when I go doorknocking, when I am out at community events, people are not saying to me, “We need a greater focus on human rights, Jeremy.” They do not say to me, “We need more public art,” or “We need a better arboretum.” They are not the issues that are of concern to the people that we represent. They are the concerns of people like Jon Stanhope and his colleagues in ACT Labor and his successor, Katy Gallagher.

When we see a health system where people cannot get into emergency departments in the time frames in which they should, when we see the problems that we have in infrastructure in the city, you have to question what the government’s priorities are. Yesterday there was some discussion in this place about economic performance—how our debt was creeping up. We have seen unemployment rise to the highest levels. So there are issues, and there are issues of expenditure. You can see where governments spend on things that are nice to have but are not required—champagne on a beer budget—and the consequences of that. You can look at examples. You can look at

other states and jurisdictions. You can look at the debt problems in Queensland. You can look at the debt problems elsewhere in the world and what happens in places like Greece, Italy, France or perhaps the UK, where people outspend their budgets.

We know that the economic times are not good. We know that the future is unclear. Spending taxpayers' money, the people of Canberra's money, on things that essentially are not there for them as their priorities is somewhat reckless.

In conclusion, we are happy to support the motion. We are happy to acknowledge that the arboretum is there. But we now have a responsibility in opposition, as oppositions do, to hold the government to account, to make sure that all that they promised that it will be comes to fruition, to make sure that there is no more hard-earned money from ACT taxpayers spent than needs to be, that the indulgence that has been made is now used to maximum effect and that we get the best of out of it.

I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion on today. I look forward to visiting the arboretum. I look forward to, as with anything else that we do as an opposition, making sure that the government is making the best use of the assets of the ACT, that belong to the people of the ACT, for the use of the ACT, and not turning this into some icon, some monument, to the memory of Jon Stanhope.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (10.25): I thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of the arboretum a few weeks ago and I can say there was a clear sense of joy and enthusiasm for the arboretum amongst those in attendance. I think it was one of those master strokes; the dawn service timing of that and the conduct of it was an inspired idea and I congratulate the team who were involved in that official opening.

When it was first conceived, and in its early stages, there is no doubt that the arboretum was a project that the Greens did raise concerns with. We had a number of concerns, particularly about the location, the water usage, the cost and the diversion of resources away from other horticultural assets in the ACT. The arboretum was being proposed against a backdrop of national drought, and we were certainly doing it tough here in the ACT, and experiencing the drought as strongly as anybody else. Not only was the arboretum going to be a high user of our precious potable water, but also we were concerned that many of the species to be planted would not be drought tolerant. I am pleased to note that many of the water issues for the arboretum have been largely resolved by the use of non-potable water for the young trees. No doubt the concerns expressed by the Greens and others in that early phase helped to push this approach. I think it has been a good direction that has been adopted.

We were also concerned about such a large allocation of resources in the face of other horticultural assets being underfunded or under funding pressure. As members know, many of the national institutions have been suffering under significant federal budget cuts over the past decade. The National Botanic Gardens was certainly one of the earliest agencies to face such budget cuts, meaning that it lost many of its horticulturists.

This coincided with the CIT in Weston, which had wonderful grounds and an arboretum, also closing its horticulture school. This site is now known as Featherstone Gardens and I am pleased to observe that the Weston Creek community have taken on nurturing and fostering the gardens. They have a busy job at the start, simply getting them back to a usable state, but they are doing that for community use and it is a great community project.

These losses to Canberra's horticultural sector were of serious concern to the Greens. Happily, I can now say that the Bruce CIT has a new \$14 million state-of-the-art horticultural facility which is a great training centre for budding horticulturists.

Another issue the Greens raised was the badging of the arboretum as a climate change measure and the subsequent allocation of resources to it under the banner of climate mitigation. We mentioned this specifically in the ACT budget in 2009. At that time the government had allocated \$60 million of its \$100 million climate change budget towards a range of tree planting projects, all badged as the one million trees project. Of course, planting trees can certainly assist with climate mitigation, and it is a good thing in its own right from a range of perspectives, but the amount of money that was being considered for the amount of mitigation was rather absurd, as I recall. While the majority of funding was coming from so-called climate change expenditure, climate change was not even mentioned on the arboretum website. I think it is fair to say that the government were not really clear that the arboretum was a climate change project, even though it was certainly part of the one million trees project funded from the climate change budget.

I think it is much more honest and a much better proposition to see the arboretum for what it is and to fund it as such. That is what the government moved to, and I welcome that change in perspective. As we move forward, it is important to note that the arboretum is also not a biodiversity project, does not replace or compensate for the efforts that we need to make to continue to manage our own biodiversity well, and should not become a diversion for funding away from biodiversity management in the ACT. We have an extensive network of nature parks and national parks in the ACT. When you look at discussions like time to talk, on how Canberrans see what is important to Canberra in the future, those are the areas that frequently come up as being highly important to Canberrans. We do need to resource those because they do need to be cared for, just as the arboretum does.

In 2013, with the arboretum now open to the public, I think it is time to move the discussion on. There were concerns. They were valid at the time, but there is no point persisting in criticising when the concerns have either been addressed or in some cases are simply in the past. We now need to move on to a conversation where we can ensure that the arboretum's future development is enhanced and that it becomes a key feature of the Canberra recreational and tourist landscape.

As I said earlier, I attended the opening a couple of weeks back, and was pleased to discover that many of the trees planted in the arboretum were sourced and supplied from Yarralumla Nursery. Since it was established by Charles Weston in 1914, Yarralumla Nursery has been the point of origin for most of the shrubs, trees and

grasses throughout Canberra's beautiful landscapes. Yarralumla Nursery has been researching, sourcing, growing and supplying plants for the arboretum since its inception. This has involved supplying over 50,000 trees, most of which are rare and endangered.

Yarralumla Nursery is also involved in the challenging but exciting and very rewarding task of sourcing trees throughout Australia for ceremonial plantings, such as the field maple planted by Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark and the New Zealand kauri planted by John Key, the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Many of the trees planted at the arboretum are threatened species sourced from diverse climates from around the world that previously had not been grown in the ACT. This required significant research to ensure that the species would germinate, with some species taking up to 12 months with specialised treatment to break their dormancy. Working in partnership with the arboretum, Yarralumla Nursery nurtured and cared for the young seedlings until they were hardy enough to adapt to Canberra's climate. In some cases this process took up to four years.

The plantings that Canberrans have been able to see at the arboretum are the result of years of dedication, hard work and a successful ongoing working relationship between the arboretum and Yarralumla Nursery. I congratulate the nursery on the crucial role they have played in shaping the arboretum's landscape.

Of course, the arboretum has great potential to add particular value as a tourism venue in the ACT, especially as it matures in the years ahead. The facilities that have been built on the site are impressive, and the location of the site provides a unique view across Canberra—one that I think many Canberrans do not know well. In the old days when it was a pine forest you had to be a fairly dedicated runner or mountain biker, or perhaps a rally driver, to make it to the top of Dairy Farmers Hill and see that unique perspective down the lake. I think one of the real treasures of the arboretum is that it has opened that view up and made it much more accessible to so many more people who will really appreciate that perspective. It would be fair to say, and you can see this from the enthusiasm amongst Canberrans already, that the arboretum will become a favourite venue for interstate and international visitors, as well as Canberra locals, who I know are always on the lookout for a good picnic spot to enjoy the best of what Canberra has to offer.

We are only now beginning to understand the potential of the arboretum. We saw the kite flying festival on the weekend. Certainly I have suggested to TAMS that we think about starting a fun run at the arboretum. These are the sort of opportunities that will evolve as the space evolves and grows and people start to make the most use of it.

I would like to acknowledge the great enthusiasm, hard work and passion of the Friends of the Arboretum. I commend them for the efforts they have put in, and I hope they are enjoying seeing the fruits of their efforts become reality. Their unbounded enthusiasm for the arboretum, their volunteering to become guides at the arboretum, really is a credit to their great dedication.

I would also like to make special note of the transport strategy that ACTION put in place for the opening event. They operated free shuttle buses for the opening day, and, in combination with there being no public parking at the arboretum that day, we saw a large number of people—somewhere between 10,000 and 11,000—use the free shuttle service. Pick-ups were from five locations around town, and indications from customers were that they were exceedingly pleased with the service that was provided. It is always nice, of course, to hear from people who perhaps have not used the bus for a long time. Some of the anecdotal feedback from people was, “Oh, these buses are actually really good,” so maybe it will flow through into some greater use of the ACTION service generally. This model is something to consider for other major events around town in the future, and that is a topic we will come back to later in the day with Mr Doszpot’s motion.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the many TAMS staff who worked on this project, especially in recent months as the deadline approached. I know that there was a lot of pressure on a whole range of people in the last little period before the opening, but I think the opening came together very well, and it is a great credit to the many staff who put in hours above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that it was all right on the night, so to speak.

I certainly look forward to watching the trees continue to grow with the evolution of the arboretum and the changing colours of the season. I would like to thank Mr Gentleman for bringing this topic on for discussion today. I think it has been the right time to reflect on the arboretum, and I look forward to supporting the motion.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (10.35): I too thank Mr Gentleman for bringing forward this motion today, at a very important stage of the arboretum’s development. There is no doubt that the arboretum is a community asset that will bring much pleasure to many in our community over many decades to come. It is a place of enjoyment, recreation, research and tourism, for families, visitors and business.

The range of activities on offer there will appeal to a wide audience—cyclists, walkers, children, nature lovers and those who simply want to enjoy a coffee, with the best view in Canberra. It will be a place where celebrations are held, unions are forged, vows are taken and business ventures begin. I have no doubt it will feature prominently in the lives of many Canberrans over the coming decades and it will grow into the city’s most spectacular and popular attraction. The many thousands of people who have already attended and who enjoyed the recent open day are testament to the widespread community support for the arboretum.

The arboretum will create jobs and provide an economic boost to the territory as the arboretum matures and becomes a tourist attraction in its own right. It will generate revenue through the activities and events held at the venue and will hopefully, over time, be revenue neutral. The money spent on the arboretum is just a fraction of the money expended each year on delivering core services to the community.

Going to some of the comments made by Mr Hanson, the government's role is to spend taxpayers' money for the benefit of the entire community. So that does mean delivering core services whilst also balancing the need to spend small sums on the arts, sports and in this case even trees—things that bring pleasure, create a sense of community and pride, and encourage social inclusion.

Mr Hanson also said that the arboretum is a monument to Jon Stanhope. How wrong could he be! But I would acknowledge former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope for his relentless commitment to and his passion for the project. Without him, the arboretum simply would not have occurred. Mr Stanhope persisted where others might not have in the face of strong resistance to his idea. He was determined that the site could be and should be made into the most beautiful place that could be imagined. He took that vision to the community, he took it to the cabinet and he argued his case passionately, believing he would eventually win over the disbelievers. And he did. The doubters are now in the minority and we can see now what a fabulous asset this place is for the people of Canberra.

The arboretum is not a monument to any single, one person. It is a wonderful community facility. It is an investment in the future of our city and future generations. It is a centre of research excellence, it is a centre of volunteer activity, it is a national attraction and it is a place for local celebration and ceremony. These are important areas for the ACT government to lead on and invest in.

Mr Stanhope was there. He did attend the opening of the arboretum, and I was very pleased to have him back from Christmas Island for it. He was the reason that the arboretum happened, but there are a whole load of people who have taken up the challenge that he presented to them. Those are people like:

- John Mackay;
- the National Arboretum Strategic Advisory Board, all the members that sit on that;
- the Friends of the National Arboretum, organised by Jocelyn Plovits;
- the Village Building Company, which was one of the first corporate supporters for the arboretum;
- ACTEW, who have been up there and invested in the discovery garden;
- the members of the National Bonsai and Penjing Collection, who have been housed down at Commonwealth Park and who now have a purpose built place for a national bonsai and penjing collection, a permanent place—and I cannot believe that anyone who has visited that pavilion can walk in there and not have their breath taken away by how stunning the work of those bonsai and penjing artists is and the trees that they have created;
- Southern Tablelands Ecosystems Park, STEP, who are always down there, I think, on a Thursday; they have one of the bottom lots at the arboretum.

To see the volunteer activity, to see the forest they have planted, the research they are undertaking there is incredible. But also you speak to the contractors and the artists involved with the development of the function centres, the reflective pavilion that is being built at the moment, the roads, the plantings—all of them have been taken away with the importance of this project.

I would like to acknowledge the commonwealth government also for their very generous contribution of \$20 million. That went to helping finance the village centre. And it is not just the function centre; there is going to be probably the best playground in Canberra, until the boundless playground is finished, at the arboretum. I was there yesterday morning, having a look at how that playground is going. So people will be able to bring their children there and their children will be able to play in a playground that you will not find anywhere else in the world. It is happening right here in Canberra.

The Waldren family have been very generous with their donations, financial donations, to the arboretum. They have provided, I think, not only emotional support in their understanding of the vision of the arboretum but also their sponsorship towards the development of the arboretum.

Going to what Mr Rattenbury said, there have been a whole load of ACT government officials involved in this project, from the days of LAPS, Economic Development, the Chief Minister's Department and finally, in the last 18 months or so, TAMS. There was a lot of pressure on getting all of that done for the opening. So thanks to Gary Byles and his executive director, Fay Steward, who did an incredible job. I think there were many sleepless nights in the lead-up to the arboretum. Thanks to all the officers that sit below those executives and to the arboretum team. Everyone involved, I think, would accept that the day went off just as we had wanted it to.

Let us not forget the size of this project—250 hectares of land right in the middle of the city, burnt out through bushfire. The question before the government at the time was what to do with this land. I think when the criticism is made of the timing of the arboretum's development and the decision around the arboretum, we must remember it in that context, that we had had a bushfire that had ripped through, that had burnt down the pines, and the government had to make a decision about what we were going to do with that land. We would not let it turn into weeds. It had to be managed. I think there were several choices around how that could be managed.

The view from Dairy Farmers Hill is amazing, and anyone who has been up there, I think, would understand the opportunity that was presented to do something different, to do something long term, to do something that was investing in Canberra and really separating Canberra from perhaps its traditional belief that it is just the seat of the national parliament, to have this amazing national attraction.

The emphasis of Mr Gentleman's motion today is to try to get bipartisan support for the National Arboretum, to acknowledge that it has opened, the value of it and the efforts of all people in getting it to the point it is today.

We have had a number of ceremonial tree plantings; we have had some very high-level people plant trees at the arboretum. I have certainly been there with the United Nations Director-General, the presidents of Lebanon, Portugal, Thailand. I know that Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark came, as did the Swedish ambassador. We have had people like Glenn McGrath from the McGrath Foundation—and we know all the work they do around breast cancer—and the Prime Minister of New Guinea. Anyone I go up there with, any prominent person, cannot believe that we took the opportunity we did to do something like this and plant 100 endangered forests right in the centre of our city. It is not happening anywhere else in the world and I think it is something that we should be proud of.

I would, in conclusion, say that it would be nice to have members of the opposition there. There have been times when I have invited all members of the Assembly to be at the arboretum, and the opposition, for whatever reason, have chosen just not to participate. I have to say that it is embarrassing when you have internationally prominent officials and politicians come and there are only representatives from the government of the local Assembly. And I would hope that now that it is open we see that change, that when you are invited, we do see a representative come from the Liberal Party or the opposition and actually attend.

Mr Doszpot: We did attend. Mr Smyth and I had attended functions.

MS GALLAGHER: I am not talking about a free dinner, Mr Doszpot. I am talking about when we plant trees, with foreign dignitaries, that the opposition is represented there. Quite often I have had those dignitaries ask: “Where is your opposition leader?” Not here! Does not come here! Does not believe in it! And it does get awkward. So hopefully under Mr Hanson’s leadership we will see a change in that and there will be attendance at those very important functions by members of the Assembly. (*Time expired.*)

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (10.45), in reply: In closing, can I just thank everybody for their contributions to this motion today and touch on a few comments, firstly, from Mr Hanson. I am glad that he has acknowledged the arboretum is there. It has been there for a little while now, but I am glad he has acknowledged that and that he looks forward to visiting the arboretum. It is an absolutely spectacular sight.

I was a bit concerned in his comments where he mentioned the future is unclear for Canberra. I do not know. I think Canberra has a very strong future. I was born here in the ACT. We have a nickname for those born in the ACT in my day, and that is BLers, “before the lake”. I have watched Canberra grow from a city of some 20,000 people to now 370,000 people and I think the roots that we have planted in that city’s growth and the future that we are seeing now are very strong.

In response to Mr Rattenbury’s comments, I am glad to hear the good news that the CIT horticultural program is going ahead at Bruce and, of course, it is wonderful to see the work they are putting in there. Just to comment on his concerns or the Greens’ concerns on the day about the conversations with the arboretum on climate change not appearing on the website, it does actually appear twice on the website, although it is in

response to those professionals that we have that have worked on the arboretum and their concerns about climate change and the work that the arboretum can do to mitigate some of the carbon footprint we have in the ACT.

Just on the Chief Minister's comments, it was wonderful for her to recognise some of those important people that have been foundation, I guess, participants in the work on the arboretum: John Mackay, who used to be my boss years ago; of course, Jocelyn Plovits, who has done so much work, as the Chief Minister mentioned, for the Friends of the National Arboretum; but also ACTEW's corporate association with the arboretum; and the Village Building Company. I know that Village are very keen on the work there.

But it is not just Village Building Company in our, I guess, commercial enterprises in the ACT that have been supportive. The Canberra Business Council had a dinner there recently, and many people attended that—I know Ms Porter did—on 7 February. The Canberra Business Council say that they have long recognised the potential for the arboretum to become a national and international tourist destination in its own right, a unique resource that will complement the other national attractions in Canberra and greatly enhance the tourism industry. They held their dinner there, as I said—the summer soiree, they call it—amid the forests on 7 February.

So thanks once again for all those contributions to this important motion.

Motion agreed to.

Hospital emergency department waiting times

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (10.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) acknowledges the outstanding work of staff in The Canberra Hospital and Calvary Hospital Emergency Departments; and
- (2) requests that the Auditor-General conduct a performance audit of Emergency Department waiting times in the ACT as a matter of priority.

At the outset, let me make it very clear that this is a genuine attempt from the opposition to improve the performance of our emergency departments. There are politics in everything that we do, but at its core this is about making improvements in our health system and making sure that we get a better result for the people of Canberra. I could have the opportunity to bang on about emergency departments for the next four years, but what I want to do is something constructive. I want to provide a way ahead, a solution that should be palatable to all, that has someone who has expertise, is thoroughly apolitical, address the issues that we have in our emergency departments.

There is a reality that the waiting times have reached a crisis point in the ED. Our staff are under enormous pressure. I know that I often get criticism from the government about my comments and their effect on staff but when I talk to staff what

they want is resolution to the problems that they face. I have only the most enormous respect for the staff and that is reflected in the motion that I have moved today.

I do want to move, where we can, beyond the politics of this. I am not trying to pretend that this is all light and sunshine and that there is an end to politics in this place. But certainly this is an opportunity today to collaboratively, as an Assembly, say that there is a problem, recognise the problem and recognise a solution to it. Over successive years, over the last six years of the Minister for Health, Katy Gallagher, and her predecessors, there has been a steady decline in those waiting time performances. That is empirical data and we have reached a point where we are at our lowest ebb. There is no question.

If we turn to the latest quarterly report, it shows that across all categories the waiting times have deteriorated over the last year. In only one category we met the national targets but even in that category the time decreased. We had an explanation for the category 1 decrease yesterday. I thank the Chief Minister for that. Category 2 went from 73 per cent seen on time to 68 per cent; category 3, 48 per cent to 42 per cent; category 4, 47 per cent to 44 per cent; and category 5, 81 per cent to 78 per cent. Across all categories, the percentage went from 54 per cent to 50 per cent.

It is a significant decline and it is, as I said, the lowest in the ACT's history and the longest waiting times in the nation. Disturbingly, the number of patients who just did not wait for one reason or another, who just actually gave up, went up eight per cent. The percentage of patients experiencing access block—that is, waiting longer than eight hours to be admitted to a bed—has increased. Thirty per cent of patients now wait more than eight hours. The latest report on government services provides some comparative data and shows how, comparative to other jurisdictions, we have deteriorated. We were at that point in the ROGS data—I acknowledge that that data is slightly out of date—just in front of the Northern Territory.

Yesterday the Chief Minister came up with some reasons for the problems—the size of the jurisdiction of the ACT and a range of different issues. But regardless of the excuses, regardless of the unique nature of the ACT, the fact is that we are just going backwards. We are going backwards at a rapid rate and we are going backwards comparative to other jurisdictions. That is just unacceptable.

The government signed up to national targets. From my understanding—the Chief Minister and the health minister may wish to clarify this—we look like missing out on about \$800,000 of funding. If we knew that we had these unique circumstances, why have we signed up to targets that we are not going to achieve?

I am aware that pressure has increased on our emergency departments. There has been a six per cent increase since last year but that is not happening in isolation. It is happening across many jurisdictions. Why is it happening? There are a number of reasons for it. I do not have an exhaustive list but certainly I can mention the lack of access to GPs, the low rate of bulk-billing of GPs and the location of the nurse-led walk-in centre.

The government's own ED strategy said that if you put the walk-in centre at the hospital it will put pressure on the emergency department because everyone is going to come to the walk-in centre. A lot of people will not be able to be treated there. They will get referred off to ED, and that is exactly what has happened. That was the advice of health department officials and that was ignored by the government. The extended waiting times, the long waits for elective surgery, cause problems because people with chronic illness end up repeatedly in ED and get admitted to hospital.

In relation to the data doctoring, the health minister has admitted now that because the doctoring occurred there was a false impression about how our EDs were performing. The government—indeed, the opposition and everyone in the community—thought they were actually improving. That was not true and as a result action that should have been taken two years ago was not taken. So we are now well behind the eight ball.

Some of the recent increases in performance of waiting times are directly attributable to the fact that money was not put into the budget a couple of years ago to address that decline. There may well be other factors and that is why I want this referred to the Auditor-General to look into.

We put forward a number of policies to address problems with ED, as the government did. There are some that we consider are still of merit that the government is not introducing. Notably, I mention having a preventive health strategy and a task force to address some of those chronic illness problems, the \$5 million of support for GPs that we had, and the urgent care clinics in the suburbs so we have doctors and nurses working together to keep people out of the EDs, particularly for the low acuity so that they are not clogging up the system.

I want the Auditor-General to come in because the government has repeatedly said that it is going to fix the problem and it has not. I will provide some quotes. In 2008 in the *Canberra Times* the minister said, "So while our emergency department staff provide very efficient care, we need to improve patient flows out of our emergency departments in order to improve waiting times."

In 2009 she said, "I recognise that access block is an area that requires further attention and the government is working on this." But there were no improvements to correlate with those expressions. So the government was saying, the minister was saying, "We are on it; we are fixing it." Then the results come out and there is another decline.

In 2011, the same thing happened. The minister said, "The government would also ensure that 70 per cent of people presenting at the ED were seen within standard waiting times." No, it is 50 per cent—20 per cent off what the minister said in June 2011. In October 2011 the minister then said that Canberra's public hospitals were keeping up with increasing demand for services. No, they were not. So there has been a difference between the minister's statements, which are, "Yes, we know there is a problem but we are fixing it. It is getting better," when the reality is that it got worse and worse and worse.

What we end up with is a situation that is not just about statistics. It is about real people often in pain, often in distress, who are waiting longer than they should for treatment. There is a lot of pain and discomfort and there is an impact on people's health. I would have thought it is self-evident that if you are in a position where you need to go to the ED and you have to sit there waiting longer than you should or you are admitted in time frames longer than those within which you should be admitted, there is an impact on your health.

Indeed, the *Medical Journal of Australia* in February 2012 did a review. It looked at WA's four-hour rule, which was implemented successfully. It found that 80 lives had been saved. It makes the point that if you do not get people into their beds quickly, if you do not treat them quickly, there is an impact on people's health. It does not always result, obviously, in fatality. But it will often result in their treatment being delayed or less effective than it would otherwise have been. As I said, there is also the issue that we may be missing out on funding.

What we need to know is why the demand is increasing. Why are we waiting longer than everybody else? How can we better support our staff? How can we do all this? How can we fix the problem? I do not know all the answers. We took some to the election. The government took some. Katy Gallagher is trying to get the problem fixed but it just is not getting fixed. That is the reality.

In 2010 we had a similar problem, a real crisis in waiting times for elective surgery. The government again said, "Yes, all right. We are fixing it. We are fixing it." We were not. It was getting worse and worse and worse. At that point, I moved a motion in this place calling for a review of elective surgery. The motion was passed with the support at that time of the Greens.

The crisis that we had in elective surgery was referred to the Auditor-General and the Auditor-General conducted a performance review. As a result of that performance review, she noted there were some real problems. I will quote from the report:

ACT Health conducted an internal review of the outpatient services at TCH and a draft report in October 2010 found deficiencies in strategic planning, inconsistent application of policies and procedures across the OPDs, ad hoc processes for managing the waiting lists, and poor and inefficient communications with clinicians, consumers and staff.

She also said:

The strategies implemented by ACT Health have not been adequate to address increased demand, and reduce the waiting lists for elective surgery.

So the Auditor-General recognised a whole bunch of problems that were not being addressed. She provided some recommendations. The government has worked hard to implement those recommendations and we have seen improvements. So the model is there before us. The model is there. The government is struggling to come up with solutions, to come up with a result. The Auditor-General came in with a fresh

approach, a fresh look, an external look, and said, “These are the problems. Here are some ideas. Fix it.” We have seen improvement.

Why would we not do that for our emergency departments? Why would we miss that opportunity? I do not want to go out of this place and say things like, “The government is wanting to hide what is happening in our emergency departments; the government is not doing anything.” What I would rather do is go out and say, “The Assembly today has come up with a solution. The Assembly today has come up with a way forward. We can actually have somebody look at how to improve our emergency departments by taking a fresh look.” Why would we not do that?

The Chief Minister is sniggering across the chamber. I find that disappointing. Why is that—

Ms Gallagher: Sorry, Jeremy.

MR HANSON: Well, here is an opportunity to find a way out of the quagmire and it is disappointing that—

Ms Gallagher: I am just commenting on nice Jeremy. I am just saying how nice you are.

MR HANSON: Yes.

Ms Gallagher: Did you have a Serepax or something this morning?

MR HANSON: There is an outbreak of love. We will see. We will see from your response, Chief Minister. There was an issue with data doctoring at the emergency department. We were aware of that. The Auditor-General did a review last year on that. But let me make the point that that was a very specific review about the data tampering. It was not about the broader issues of the ED. The Auditor-General found a bunch of interim issues relating to aspects connected to the data tampering. I believe Mr Doszpot will be covering off on some of those that were addressed to the PAC committee.

But the point is that this is not about that review. This is about a broader look at the systems, at the staff, at the qualifications of staff, at the reasons for the pressures on the ED, what it is that we can do both within the hospital—perhaps with increased beds, with improved systems—and external to the hospital.

Why not have a fresh look at this? There is a decision that this Assembly can make today and it is a pretty straightforward one, to be honest. Do we acknowledge that there is a problem? Do we acknowledge that despite the government’s effort that problem is continually getting worse? Do we accept that when we had a similar problem in elective surgery we found a way through that?

I acknowledge that there has been improvement in elective surgery. I am happy to say that. Despite what the Chief Minister says, I am not here to see bad results. I want to see good results and that is why we did what we did for elective surgery. It would be

fantastic to see an improvement in our emergency departments. It would be fantastic if we could find a way that did that, even if it is incremental. I do not expect miracles overnight.

Or are we going to say, “No, the government has got this under control,” when clearly it has not, when 11 years of evidence will show that it has not? So I commend my motion to the Assembly. We do need someone to look at this. The Auditor-General is the right authority to do that. I also would like to acknowledge the other part of the motion, which is in reference to acknowledging what good work the staff do—and they do. It is difficult for them. It is difficult on a whole bunch of levels. We as an Assembly need to recognise that.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education) (11.04): I welcome the opportunity to talk about public hospital emergency departments. I would like to congratulate Mr Hanson on the change in approach he has adopted on the first day of being Leader of the Opposition in this house. It is very refreshing to see nice Jeremy come out for a play. Hopefully he will stay around for a bit longer.

Mr Hanson: Till we see nice Katy.

MS GALLAGHER: You always see nice Katy.

Mr Hanson: Really?

MS GALLAGHER: Yes. Always, always. It is who I am—nice. Perhaps too nice, I think, for politics sometimes.

As to Mr Hanson’s motion, firstly, I welcome him acknowledging the outstanding work of the staff in the Canberra Hospital and Calvary hospital emergency departments. It is very important to have a motion or an element of a motion that can be supported that sends that message to our staff. I really do not think people understand the politicisation of the emergency department that occurred in the last year and the impact that has had on staff. I think we got a taste of it during the election campaign when Mr Hanson took some very difficult questions from doctors and nurses in the emergency department about how they felt about how they had been portrayed in the media over their own work performance. So that is refreshing, and I will make sure that staff in both emergency departments understand that that has been discussed in the Assembly today. Perhaps it will go some way to dealing with the damage that has been done to the reputations of those health professionals in the past and, in particular, over the past year.

When we look at the emergency department, the last financial year was the busiest on record—118,000 presentations, a 17 per cent increase on presentations that have occurred over the last three years. This high level of demand has continued into the last year, 2012-13, with almost 60,000 presentations to the emergency departments in the first six months of 2012-13. We have also seen higher acuity presentations, up six per cent, as categories 1, 2 and 3 in particular are requiring a much higher level of care.

One of the significant impacts in the last 12 months—again, I am not trying to offer excuses; I am just putting the performance in context and explaining how having only two emergency departments and no small hospitals that essentially act as nursing homes as is the case in other jurisdictions impacts on the ACT—was the closure of one of the ACT’s key nursing homes—Ginninderra Gardens. That has had a significant impact on bed availability at the hospital. The facility had previously been a source of transferring subacute patients requiring nursing home placements. However, since its closure about a year ago, nursing-home-type bed days in our public hospitals have increased by 30 per cent or 1,000 bed days from the seven months prior to its closure.

That goes some of the way to explaining the increases we have seen in access block, particularly for older Canberrans, but access block in general because we have a much larger number of beds taken up with long-stay patients who are not going anywhere. They are not being discharged; they are staying, and that is impacting on how many people we can get out in time from the emergency department to empty beds in the hospital.

I would really like to shift the debate about the emergency department outside the emergency department, because the solution to improving waiting times in the emergency department does not rest only in the emergency department. We can put in more staff, and we will. We have got \$12 million going this year into employing more staff. We can create greater space in the emergency department and bring on new beds in the emergency department. All of that is being done. But the single biggest contributor to improving emergency department performance is improving the performance of the rest of the hospital. I am talking about the discharges from the hospital; that the hospital acts as a seven-day-a-week service—like the emergency department is open seven days a week, 24 hours a day—and that we have those kinds of business processes working through the hospital so that beds are being opened, people are being discharged early, and that patients who are in the emergency department and may have come into the emergency department overnight are getting access to those beds in the morning.

That requires significant cultural change in the hospital from everybody—from the administrators and from doctors—but unless we are creating those bed spaces in the morning we are going to have this pressure in the ED. The position the emergency department staff get put in is that they cannot clear people out of the emergency department into the rest of the hospital, so they take up beds in the ED. Therefore, ED staff cannot bring in people that are in the waiting room because their beds are taken up by people who need to go to the hospital. And yet they are the ones that get the bad press about their performance, and it is not them. They do everything they can to get people out of the emergency department. They do not want them sitting in the emergency department; they want them in beds in the hospital.

We have to require every ward to change their practices. We have to require our VMOs and staff specialists to change their practices, and we are doing all of that work with them at the moment. We are seeing change across the hospital. I met with the ED senior staff I think in December last year to talk to them. They admitted to me, “We

have taken our eye off the ball on timeliness. We have. Last year.” That was because of the pressure they were under. They lost a colleague, a doctor from the emergency department, who died suddenly. Their senior manager was involved in the data doctoring there. They were under pressure in a political year; the biggest contest in health was between Mr Hanson and me on the emergency department doctoring. Let us not forget that and the impact that had on staff.

I met with them in December and they told me, “Yes, we just wanted to get through the year and we took our focus off those business programs that we put in place that were designed to drive down emergency department waiting times.” But they committed to me and they said, “We are refocusing. We are putting new energy in.” They acknowledged that, with the political heat out of their performance, they felt more capable of making some the changes that were required, and they were putting a lot of effort into improving the morale in the workplace based on what was just an unbelievable year for them at Canberra Hospital.

I expect, and I have said this before, that I will see improvements in emergency department waiting times. In the meantime I have been out there defending them and defending their practices. I know the work changes are underway; I know they are. I know that everybody who walks into the emergency department that needs to be seen on time is seen. I know that. Lives are saved in that ED every single day, but, yes, those who are waiting for less urgent attention are waiting too long, and we need to make sure that we are improving that.

I have been up to the federal parliament and I have had meetings with the Minister for Health. I have sought to have our NEAT targets amended based on the data doctoring. We entered those targets, Mr Hanson, under the false belief that our performance was improving, because that was the information I had before me; it was the information the government had before us—that is, the changes we had put in place were working.

A year on we all know that that was not the case and that the improvements were not being seen. So those targets we signed up to needed to be realistic based on what we actually knew the performance of the ED to be. The commonwealth has agreed to us changing our targets and has written to me to that effect. So, instead of 73 per cent of patients in 2013 requiring to be seen within four hours, that will be 65 per cent, and the target in 2014 will be 77 per cent. The challenge in 2015 will be 90 per cent.

In relation to the 800,000, I do not know what representations anyone else in this place has made, but I have been up there trying to protect that money, too. It is not the fact that \$800,000 in the health system or the emergency department will change resources significantly—it will not—but the important thing is that I was in there fighting for those staff. They did not deserve to have another loss attributed to their performance in the hospital. It is a hospital-wide issue and it can be solved only by the hospital working together. The commonwealth has agreed that that money will be carried forward and it will be available to the ACT over the four years of the agreement if we meet our targets.

There is a big job ahead of us, but at least we are at a point now where we are setting realistic targets for the performance of the ED. We do not need to put any more

pressure on them around that. We have got agreement about what are reasonable targets to achieve, and the commonwealth government has agreed to that.

In relation to some of the changes that we will be putting into the ED, there are obviously additional resources—\$12 million was in the last budget and we have some business or work practice changes that will come into effect. Again, the solution is going to be for the whole hospital to get behind it and not just leave this and treat this as an emergency department issue, which I think is how the media portray it and how the opposition portray it. We need to acknowledge that this is a health systems issue that has to be responded to.

We need to make sure we are diverting more people from the emergency department than are coming in. We can do that through innovations like the walk-in centre, and we will be taking those walk-in centres to the community. Again, the reason it is on the hospital grounds at the moment is that the doctors—the AMA and the Division of General Practice—would not agree to its operation unless it was on the hospital grounds. I know that little bit of information is constantly dropped out of criticism about the walk-in centre, but that walk-in centre would never have opened, it would never have seen the 30,000-odd people it has seen, if I had not agreed to it being on the hospital site.

I always had the view it should not be on the hospital site, but it was the only way that service was going to be opened. I am still going to face a few battles getting that service out to the community in the community health centres. But we have made election commitments to have one in—

Mr Hanson: Put doctors with it.

MS GALLAGHER: Well, there was a disagreement, as you know, Mr Hanson, between the AMA and the Division of General Practice and the staff specialists in the hospital. Let us just not forget that. The staff specialists in the hospital did not want it at the hospital; the AMA and the Division of General Practice refused to support the opening of the walk-in centre, and we needed their support around clinical governance and ensuring that the community felt it was a safe service. It was the first time we had opened a nurse-led service, and I could not have done that if I had the AMA and the Division of General Practice on the sidelines saying it was not a safe service. I needed them at the table as part of the governance committee. The terms on which they would participate in that were that it remain on the hospital site under the clinical governance of the hospital.

The staff specialists have a different view, and I am hoping that, with some careful negotiations, we can roll out our election commitments smoothly and with the support of the AMA and the division now that we have good data about the safety of the service and the excellent customer feedback from people who have used it. I do not know if any other members in this place have used it; I have used it four or five times for my children. It provides an excellent service, particularly on Sundays at 4 o'clock when children get sick, it is a great place. And 30,000 people cannot be wrong. Even though it has not reduced pressure off the ED as we would have liked it to, the fact that it is seeing the numbers that it is seeing—it is generally seeing the people that we

wanted it to see with low-acuity illnesses or injury—means it is providing a service, and a free service when we are looking at some of the issues people have in access to health care in the ACT.

Overall, I think the approach we are taking is the right one. I am not pretending there are not real difficulties ahead in terms of meeting timeliness, but at the same time as we meet timeliness and focus on timeliness, let us look at quality of service, which is always very high, and let us look at the lives that are saved. Let us have that as part of the narrative—the work that is done. Let us also make sure it is a hospital-wide solution. That is the work before me. That is the work that has already started, and change comes slowly in health. You cannot go in there and just bang your fist on the table and expect things to change. You have to work with clinicians, and that is what we are doing. Over time, if we can shift the focus off the emergency department and shift the focus across the hospital about what is happening to support the work in the emergency department, we will see timeliness improve.

We will be supporting the motion with an amendment moved by Mr Rattenbury. It acknowledges that I have already asked the Auditor-General to come out within 12 months and review progress. How she chooses to conduct that and the scope of that audit is entirely up to her. I understand she has that as a potential review on her audit work ahead of her. I will provide the plan to improve access to the emergency department in March this year. That will be a hospital-wide plan, as I have outlined in the motion today.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (11.19): I thank Mr Hanson for raising the issue today because it is one of considerable interest in the community. I think that overall the service and treatment that patients receive in our hospitals are excellent. The majority of people who need emergency treatment are dealt with efficiently and with great care. I note that the first part of Mr Hanson's motion acknowledges the outstanding work of the staff in the hospital and, I think implicitly, the dedication with which they approach what is often a very difficult task. The Greens acknowledge that emergency department waiting times is an issue that needs to be looked at. The report on government services released last week shows that Canberra hospitals have the longest emergency department waiting times in Australia. As I said, that is a matter of public concern.

Although I recognise the concerns behind Mr Hanson's motion today, I do not support all of the action that he calls for. The Auditor-General's Office is certainly a good organisation to analyse and assess many problems with government activities. However, I do not believe that in this instance it is the right step at this stage if we want to truly address the problem. The Auditor-General is, of course, our central review agency to ensure probity in government action and it was appropriate that the issues concerning the accuracy of the data were considered by the Auditor-General.

My amendment notes that the government has requested that the Auditor-General review the progress on implementing improvements to the emergency department performance information and we await the report of the review. I recognise that this

review will only address the processes around the performance information and will not go directly to the problems around how to reduce the number of people using our emergency departments and the amount of time that they may need to wait. I think this is an area which would benefit patients, the health budget and staff in emergency departments alike.

Equally, the Auditor-General conducts performance audits to ensure the effective operation of administrative units. In this instance, to address the substantive concerns that I think Mr Hanson seeks, and noting the already full performance audit program that the Auditor-General has—that is something that is identified through the public accounts committee; I know the program is quite full over the next two years—the more appropriate first step is for the Assembly to be made aware of what the government is doing and plans to do to address the issues in the emergency department. I do not agree that at this point in time it is appropriate for the Auditor-General to conduct a performance audit. With the benefit of the information and an assessment of the progress in emergency department performance information, as will be reported by the Auditor-General later this year, I think the Assembly will be in a far better position to determine whether a further review by the Auditor-General will be necessary.

Given the nature of the emergency department and the issues it faces, there may well be more appropriate mechanisms for tackling the access issue. It is an access issue. I think there is a general acknowledgement that, once into the system, the quality of care is extremely high. The point of concern which Mr Hanson is expressing and which people in the community have raised with me is about how long it takes to access that service. Until we have more information from the government, I do not think we are in a position to make that assessment. The Greens were very clear last term that we do not believe—and this is an important thing to draw out—that the numbers are the be-all and end-all, and that we need to look at the health outcomes we achieve as the best guide to how the health system is working.

As I said, there is a concern about the times, and certainly some of the ROGS information creates a particular picture. The position we have taken consistently—I think Ms Bresnan articulated this very well in the last Assembly—is that it is about looking at the overall health outcome. In that context I note that recommendation 1 from the Auditor-General in the recent report was to improve publicly reported performance indicators and to include additional qualitative indicators. That is something that I intend to continue to pursue following on from the work that Ms Bresnan did last term. To the extent that access issues and waiting times affect these outcomes, they need to be addressed.

I have circulated an amendment to the motion which I now move:

Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) notes that the Government has invited the Auditor-General to carry out a review 12 months after the completion of Performance Report 6/2012 (*Emergency Department Performance Information*) to review progress with implementation of the recommendations; and

- (3) calls on the Minister to detail to the Assembly the Government's plan to improve access to the emergency departments by the last sitting day in March 2013."

There are a couple of points to this amendment. The first part is to note that the government has invited the Auditor-General to carry out a review 12 months after the completion of the performance report to review progress with implementation of the recommendations. I think that provides a very clear point of scrutiny from the Auditor-General to assess whether that first set of recommendations has been implemented. I think it is important that there is space provided for recommendations that have already been made to be implemented and then assess whether they have worked. That is part of the rationale of my approach today.

That leads me to the second point, which is to have the health minister detail to the Assembly the government's plan to improve access to the emergency department back to the Assembly. As I think Mr Hanson said at the start of his speech, it is a genuine attempt to improve performance. If the health minister, the Chief Minister, comes into the Assembly and provides the government's strategy, a clear strategy, to outline what the intended steps are in light of some of the recent issues—the Chief Minister identified some of those in her speech today when she said that health department staff have indicated that they may have dropped the ball on something; they had other distractions going on—then we can actually have a discussion. Mr Hanson probably knows the health topic rather better than I do; I am still a learner on this portfolio. Then we can sit here and critically analyse whether those steps, in fact, address the concerns that are held. I think that is a good basis for the Assembly to proceed on a discussion.

The Greens would like to see more work done to address ways to reduce the pressure on our hospitals and, in particular, for this motion, our emergency rooms. We know there is a huge amount of pressure on our emergency staff. However, this is not necessarily an indicator of a poorly-run facility. I think all members of this place would agree that it is vital that the emergency department runs as efficiently as possible. As Ms Bresnan said many times in the previous Assembly, we do not want to devote huge amounts of government resources to evaluating artificial key performance indicators that do not actually address the key issues, such as reducing the number of people using emergency in the first case, for instance.

We believe in finding solutions to the problems. It is clear there are problems facing emergency departments right around Australia. We already know that waiting times are longer than people expect and that the health system is struggling in some areas to respond to our ageing population and the increasingly complex needs presented to the emergency department. We understand that nobody wants to wait for an extended time in the emergency room to receive treatment, but I do not think that the length of time that people have to wait is at the heart of the issue. Whether all the people that are there actually need to be there or could be treated elsewhere more efficiently is vital to know, as well as working towards longer term health solutions, such as older people having regular health checks and access to equipment at home and clinics.

I suspect we have all heard the anecdotes of people who have gone to the emergency department because they have a bad toothache, a sore toe or a flu which needs antibiotics. Of course, we do know that it can be hard to get into a GP at short notice, and this, amongst other factors, is one issue which needs improvement. I think reducing the pressure on our emergency department will require a broad range of measures. I imagine that things like increasing people's use of the walk-in clinic and increasing the number of walk-in clinics—points the Chief Minister has referred to today—are important steps. Certainly, the Greens took additional ideas to the election which included increasing medical check-up access for older people who are less mobile, through, for example, providing mobile health clinics or GPs stationed in aged-care facilities. These are the sorts of issues which I think are the broader answers to the question of waiting times in emergency departments.

Of course, a key area which the Greens believe deserves a much higher government focus is preventive health to help people stay healthier longer and to manage health issues themselves and with practitioners outside the hospital system. I suspect that the health department has already investigated many of these actions. That is why my amendment asks that the health minister detail what actions are already in play to help reduce the pressure on the emergency department. Instead of delivering another inquiry, our amendment today seeks to explore the strategies the government is putting in place, or plans to put in place, to address a very well-known subject. That is the spirit here. I think this comes to the point that Mr Hanson is trying to make, which is that we need a genuine attempt to improve performance. This amendment seeks to ensure that we have all the information on the table so that we can make a good assessment here in the Assembly.

Health is an incredibly complex area with multiple facets, reflecting transient population movement, ageing, birth rates, health promotions and public perception. I do not think we can unfairly target and focus in on the emergency department to the exclusion of other departments. That is why I think a broader discussion about access to the emergency department rather than a simple focus on waiting times is the direction the Assembly needs to take. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.29): I just indicate briefly that the opposition will not be supporting the amendment. There are two issues at hand with the amendment moved by Mr Rattenbury. The Auditor-General's report 6 of 2012 was about data doctoring. We need to move beyond that. Obviously that is an issue that needs to be addressed in terms of improvement of health systems, but we need to make sure that we have a look at the system. Mr Rattenbury is saying that it is not just what is in the emergency department; it is what comes in and what goes out. I could not agree more. This is about the whole system. It is about what impacts on health in terms of demand, why people come into the emergency department, what options there are elsewhere—be it nurse-led walk-in clinics or be it other options—and then the outputs in terms of people getting into beds or being treated in the ED. The Auditor-General's report 6 of 2012 is limited in scope and is not, in many ways, relevant to the broader question of the emergency department performance.

The second part of the amendment is to detail the government's plan to improve the ED by the last sitting day in March 2013. The point I have made, and I made it in my speech, is that we have been hearing it for 11 years. We have seen the performance deteriorate and we have heard the government saying, "Don't worry. We've got the plans to fix it." So we are no further along. We are just hearing the same thing and we are just going to get more plans: "Don't worry. We have got the plans; we have got the programs. This is what we are doing." That is no change at all from what we have heard from this government with successive ministers for 11 years.

I reiterate that we will not be supporting the amendment because it does not achieve the effect that we need, which is an external look at our EDs. Based on the evidence, for 11 years—despite the government and this minister saying that they have got the plan to fix it—the results have proved that that is not the case.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (11.32): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the Leader of the Opposition's motion today. The motion calls on the Assembly to recognise the outstanding work of the staff in the emergency departments at Canberra and Calvary hospitals, and I have no hesitation in recognising the valuable work they do.

Good health is the most valuable asset anyone can have and it is not something that ought to be taken lightly. Just as important to good health, good health services are a most valuable contribution that a government needs to provide to the community. More importantly, it is a responsibility that the government has to provide to the community.

No-one knows when one is likely to need the services of any hospital section, much less the emergency department. And it is not unreasonable to expect that here in the ACT, where we are constantly reminded of our higher socioeconomic status, we should enjoy a first-class health system. We have the framework, we have the staff, but, sadly for our community, we simply do not have the quality government service support or commitment that a good health service needs.

Any scanning of *Hansard* over the last six years and any cursory trail through media clippings provides the reader with a grim picture. It is a grim picture of government failure, of lack of care, of overworked and under-appreciated staff. Only last October, the *Canberra Times* commented:

The complexity of administering large hospitals is such that even the best-run facilities experience mishaps from time to time. In this, the ACT's two public hospitals are not immune. In the past month in Canberra, there have been at least two publicised instances of "access block" at Canberra Hospital's emergency department and the acute mental health unit, one involving an elderly cancer patient suffering severe breathing difficulties forced to wait 33 hours before being admitted to a ward. A baby narrowly escaped injury after a wooden panel dropped from a wall on to a cot in the new Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, and at the same facility staff missed a call for help to resuscitate a baby in a neonatal intensive care unit. Later, the mother of the child concerned (one of

twins) discovered after returning from the ICU that her personal belongings had been taken from her room in readiness for a new arrival, forcing her to sit for two hours in a waiting room before being discharged. None of these episodes resulted in lasting harm. But they are certainly distressing experiences for the individuals concerned and symptomatic of a health system under stress.

A health system under stress—and indeed it is. Indeed, Mr Rattenbury, the crux of this motion is to examine the reasons why these issues have caused so much stress not only to the community but to the people involved in delivering health services, and to seek ways to address these issues as a matter of priority.

Consistently throughout the last Assembly, the shadow minister for health asked question after question. He sought answers through estimates, through FOI requests, through references to committees and by representations to the minister.

We have had Auditor-General's reports that confirmed the delays in elective surgery waiting lists. We have had industrial trouble among the maternity staff as bullying allegations went unaddressed. And what have we heard from the Minister for Health? We have had obfuscation, we have had avoidance of the truth, and data tampering claims that were denied and denied until even the Chief Minister could no longer ignore those issues.

How was that particular issue managed? We had more denials and attempts to blame it all on the Liberals, buck passing, and staff put under such unbearable pressure that they were forced to resign. And what was of most concern was the Chief Minister's attitude and comments on this matter, which were quite alarming. She said she could not understand what all the fuss was about, that no-one had committed murder. Chief Minister, there was data tampering—11,700 cases of it. We have spoken about this before. But with respect to the gravity of this situation—it is a laughing matter, I can see, Chief Minister; a laughing matter indeed.

We have a situation where, if you are in the commercial sector and there is an attempt to defraud the government, there is a huge outcry and normally prison sentences or very great—

Ms Gallagher: That's what you would like, to send a nurse to prison, would you?

MR DOSZPOT: I would like to see some seriousness on your part, Chief Minister, rather than having a grin when we are talking about these issues and you have not been giving your—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, will you address your comments through the chair?

Ms Gallagher: Mr Doszpot has got Mr Hanson's speech, I think.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Ms Gallagher.

MR DOSZPOT: Ms Gallagher, I am taking this situation very seriously, and I suggest—

Ms Gallagher: Oh, and I haven't, Steve?

MR DOSZPOT: You are certainly not exhibiting those—

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, resume your seat, please. When members are speaking to the motion, or to the amendment, as is the case at the moment, they should please address the chair. Do not have conversations across the chamber and with members opposite. Address your comments through the chair and continue with your speech, instead of engaging in conversation with the minister. If the minister does not engage in conversation across the chamber, that would be helpful.

MR DOSZPOT: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am very happy to take your direction, and I would also ask that that direction be given in a little bit more robust terms to the Chief Minister, who started engaging with me before I had engaged with her.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Doszpot, you do not need to tell me how to do my job. I have already spoken to Ms Gallagher, as you heard. Just continue on.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We were talking about the 11,700 cases of fraud that apparently the Chief Minister found very hard to understand. The health minister could not run from these figures. They were not a Liberal Party beat-up. They were stark reminders—Chief Minister, 11,700 stark reminders that will not leave you alone. And all the while, while all of this was going on, the waiting lists have become longer than before, and worse than anywhere else in Australia.

Yesterday we discussed the issue of the latest report from the government, the Productivity Commission's report on government services. Waiting times are worse in every category, with only 44 in every 100 patients requiring semi-urgent treatment being seen on time. It is even worse for urgent cases. Only 42 per cent are seen within acceptable time frames. For six years, the health minister, Ms Gallagher, has been saying she would improve the ACT health system and for six years we have seen our emergency department waiting times get worse. We also have elective surgery delays and staff that are under pressure and we have had emergency department delays.

During the last election campaign, a whole host of promises were made. Labor promised \$74 million for new beds, doctors and nurses at Canberra Hospital, in addition to providing 70 new beds at Calvary hospital. There is the construction of a new subacute hospital on the north side, to which Labor says it is fully committed but to which it has yet to set aside any more than \$4 million for planning purposes. That might have persuaded some voters and was possibly welcomed by hospital staff and health professionals, but it will be just another cruel abuse of hospital staff if it comes to naught, and the track record on this is not good.

Certainly, the government's track record on health did not impress a Labor health minister in South Australia. In commenting late last year in the South Australian parliament about a study published by the Australasian College for Emergency

Medicine that highlighted the unacceptably high number of emergency patients in the ACT, Northern Territory and South Australia who have waited more than 24 hours for a hospital bed, the South Australian minister described Canberra Hospital as “poorly performing”. Interestingly, the report was written by an associate professor at the ANU who also works part time at the Canberra Hospital, so clearly he is in a position to know.

The only response from our own health minister was to challenge the methodology and to suggest:

There is no benefit to patients when someone takes a cheap shot at a hospital. What patients do benefit from is government investing in more nurses, more beds and better facilities.

This is what I am delivering and will continue to deliver.

The Chief Minister is not here at the moment but I say to the Chief Minister: you have been in the Health portfolio for six years. How much longer do Canberra patients have to wait before we see this investment?

Surely Canberra ratepayers ought to have better responses than denials and challenges to methodology when negative findings are made. Indeed, if you believe that the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine does not have robust study methodology, you should support this motion for the ACT Auditor-General to conduct its own performance audit of our emergency department. We saw the benefits when the Auditor-General assessed elective surgery. Give that opportunity to the emergency department.

If ACT Labor are genuine about delivering quality service in the health system and want to demonstrate a true commitment to transparency in government and to better health services—(*Extension of time granted.*) If Labor are genuine and want to demonstrate a true commitment to transparency in government and to better health services, they will support this motion. To do otherwise demonstrates Labor’s real intentions for health—more cover-ups and more hollow promises.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (11.42): I rise to speak in support of this critically important motion calling for a performance audit into the state of our public hospital emergency waiting times. The latest quarterly report of ACT health services shows a consistent inability of emergency departments under this minister to meet their own performance targets. Even by their own admissions we are failing Canberra residents. According to ACT Health’s own report, the waiting times for categories 3 and 4 patients were a third or more below target with less than 50 per cent of category 4 patients seen within an hour and waiting times actually deteriorating in 2011-12 compared with the previous year.

Across all categories ACT Health has been forced to admit that only 55 per cent of patients are seen in the target time period. The really dubious statistic, however, is the one for category 5 patients. According to the latest report, 81 per cent of category 5 patients in 2011-12 were seen within two hours. Frankly I do not believe it. My own

experience as a mother of four children has been totally at odds with this performance claim, as have been the experiences of numerous constituents reporting to me during the election period.

I have never waited less than four hours to see my children treated in emergency, and the experience reported to me again and again by distraught parents has been that waiting in emergency at the Canberra Hospital for five or six hours is commonplace. Can you imagine the stress on a sick child to spend six hours in the middle of the night in a cold waiting room filled with sick strangers? Emergency department waiting rooms are not the peaceful waiting areas of kindly family doctors. On any given day there are distressed patients of all kinds. It is not uncommon to see loud and angry exchanges between sick or injured people who have waited for hours and hours and overworked hospital staff behind their high protective barriers. I note that during my last visit to the emergency department there were no fewer than three signs reminding patients that aggressive behaviour towards the hospital staff is inappropriate, which I agree with, but it says something about the stressful place that the hospital emergency department can be.

On one occasion I waited for four hours with a sick child until the early hours of the morning and finally was forced to leave because of the horrific wait without my child being treated. During last year's election campaign, one mother related to me that she waited over six hours for treatment at Canberra Hospital to have a piece of glass removed from her eye, which was actually lacerating the cornea of her eye. Whilst doorknocking in another area of Gungahlin, a mother told me that she had waited so many hours with her sick child that she has actually decided that next time her child is sick she will drive to a hospital in Sydney as it will be faster.

According to our own performance report, only 57 per cent of patients spend less than four hours in emergency, but I think even that is a highly questionable statistic. Let us face it—we have had something of a struggle with the concept of factual reporting under this minister. I am certainly not surprised the targets have just been changed so that we might have some hope of achieving them. I have little confidence that even these modest targets will be achieved.

If we look at the statistics for ACT Health against the national triage data nationally, category 1 patients are seen 100 per cent on time, category 2 patients are seen 80 per cent on time and, overall, categories 1 to 5 are seen 72 per cent on time. However, the ACT is seriously lagging. If we compare, as the Chief Minister suggested, our data to that of Queensland—the data that we have available—we see we are still lagging and not improving. In category 2 the ACT in 2010-11 had 78 per cent of patients seen on time and Queensland had the same figure. But as we move on to 2011-12 it was 76 per cent in the ACT versus 82 per cent in Queensland. For category 3, in the ACT, 48 per cent only seen on time in 2010-11 and Queensland, 60 per cent. But moving on to 2011-12, category 3 in the ACT is 50 per cent—a slight improvement—but Queensland also has had an improvement to 63 per cent, which we have not managed to catch up to.

In 2010-11 category 4 in the ACT was 48 per cent and Queensland, 67. Moving on to 2011-12 figures, we have gone backwards, going down to 47 per cent, while Queensland have gone ahead to 69 per cent. In 2010-11 category 5 in the ACT is 75

per cent on time versus Queensland's 90 per cent, and for 2011-12 the figure for the ACT is 81 per cent versus 90 per cent in Queensland. Obviously the data doctoring had an impact on these statistics, but the fact is we are years behind in trying to catch up on this situation. The ACT is the only jurisdiction to go backwards in 2011-12.

It is not all bad news, however, and I do not want us to be accused of only ever focusing on the bad news. Regarding unplanned admissions and returns, on the two conditions on which data was reported, tonsillectomies are admitted less often than the national average, as in readmitted less often—well done—while appendectomies, however, are readmitted above the national average.

All our beds are 100 per cent accredited, and I think that is what the Chief Minister is going to when she says there is some good news in our system. As to post-procedural separation adverse effects, on average we do better than average with adverse reactions to drugs, medicaments and biological substances, but we do worse than average in procedures creating abnormal reactions and complications. We are just over the national average of issues per 100 patients, which is a negative finding. The national average is 5.9 per 100 patients, whereas ours is six per 100 patients. We are better than several other jurisdictions, however.

It is not our job to actually tell the minister what is going right; it is our job to make sure that what is not being done properly is being addressed, and clearly there is still a lot of work to be done. Last year we were forced to move a motion of no confidence in the Chief Minister, Ms Gallagher, after it was revealed that as ACT health minister she had systematically allowed deception to occur to the ACT public over the declining state of the health system, which had gone from one of Australia's best under the last Liberal government to one of the worst.

Is it any wonder that the opposition has no confidence now that the emergency performance figures are improving—or are going to improve—particularly when we receive so many complaints that paint a much worse picture? “Routinely dismal” seems to pass for “normal” in the ACT reporting results. At the end of the day, is there any greater failure in this area than the inability to treat our sick, except perhaps to fail and then have misrepresented it? The failures are not good enough and they are not getting fixed. We must get to the bottom of how to improve. It is not the staff's fault; it is the minister's fault. Maybe a ministerial transplant is needed.

Question put:

That **Mr Rattenbury's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 7

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Ms Berry | Ms Gallagher | Mr Coe | Mrs Jones |
| Dr Bourke | Mr Gentleman | Mr Doszpot | Mr Smyth |
| Ms Burch | Ms Porter | Mrs Dunne | Mr Wall |
| Mr Corbell | Mr Rattenbury | Mr Hanson | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition) (11.53): In closing, I am disappointed that the amendment got up because it significantly weakens what we set out to achieve here, which is a comprehensive and full external review by an expert body upon our emergency departments, looking at the systems in and systems out to make sure that we have the answers that we need to improve the problem. What the amendment essentially achieves is just “let’s have a look at what the government is currently doing”. Well, we know what the government is currently doing is not working, and we know that because for the last 11 years the performance of our emergency department with regard to waiting times has deteriorated.

What we are doing, again, is just setting ourselves up for failure. We are saying, “Well, the government’s promised this is getting better; let’s believe them,” when history tells us it will not happen. That is the definition of insanity—repeatedly doing the same thing after it fails every single time. So it is disappointing that the amendment got up.

I will make a few brief remarks in closing to address some of the comments made through the debate. The minister acknowledged that there are problems with the staff and morale and the pressure they are put under because of the politicisation of the ED. I want to make the point that the reason it is criticised is that a very senior member of the staff started doctoring data to make the government look good. It is difficult in that context to blame anyone other than the government. If they are doing it to themselves as a result of the government giving out the information in dribs and drabs and not declaring honestly and openly what was happening, the government cannot blame anyone else for the politicisation, if it occurred, of the emergency department. The staff undoubtedly would have suffered there, but the accountability must go to those who were responsible and supervising and were in positions of authority for allowing these sorts of things to happen.

I thank the minister for her commitment to pass on the acknowledgement to the ED staff that they have our support, but a list of excuses really is not good enough. The admission that the staff had taken their eyes off the ball because of the ED tampering is worrying. We heard comments from the Chief Minister when this all happened: “This is just data; it doesn’t matter.” What we now find out is that it does matter and, as a result of what happened in the emergency department with the tampering, the staff took their eyes off the ball. That is something to reflect on as we move forward with our EDs.

The minister also made a comment that it is only the less urgent cases that are waiting longer. I make the point that that is not the case. In fact, the urgent category has declined to 42 per cent, the lowest level in the ACT’s history and one of the worst across the nation if not the worst. It is not true to say that it is only the lower urgency categories that are affected when it is the urgent category that has suffered perhaps the worst decline and is at such a bad point.

I wish the minister every success in getting our \$800,000, and I offer her bipartisan support. If she thinks that expressions from me or a joint letter to the federal health minister would help, I am very prepared to do that.

Ms Gallagher: I've already sorted it.

MR HANSON: If you feel that you have sorted it, that is good, but I make the point that if you need that bipartisan approach to make sure you get the result, it is on offer. I am glad to hear the federal government, as a result of the concerns about the ED tampering and the recognition it is not performing as well as the government thought, have agreed to change the targets.

There are many solutions to the problems that plague our ED waiting times. The government, no doubt, have some of the answers, but they do not have all the answers, and it is disappointing to me that we are missing an opportunity where we could have somebody external to this place, somebody expert in the process, somebody apolitical, actually examine what the problems are in order to come up with the solutions so that we could have a better result for the Canberrans waiting in our EDs. That is what it is all about. I am very disappointed that that opportunity has been missed.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Major events at Manuka Oval

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (11.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) Manuka Oval has played host to two international sporting events in the past month and more are planned for the future;
- (b) the key role that Cricket ACT has played in raising the profile of cricket in the Territory and congratulates them for their success in doing so;
- (c) that both matches were well patronised, with tickets to the second event, the One Day International cricket match between Australia and the West Indies, sold out weeks before the game was held;
- (d) that many people, including people from interstate, and other tourists, as well as local families, needed to take their cars to the game and parking options were extremely limited;
- (e) that notwithstanding that the size of the crowds were known well in advance, there were a number of event management aspects that attracted widespread criticism including long queues for food and drink at both games and parking which not only impacted on those attending the games but also residents; and
- (f) that the Government's response to parking management was to bring in additional parking inspectors to book cars that were parked contrary to current regulations; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) develop a parking management plan for the Manuka precinct for future games that takes into consideration the need for short term temporary parking for large numbers of cars at major events, recognising that not everyone can, or wants to, avail themselves of public transport, no matter how many buses are provided or how well they are promoted; and
- (b) review existing catering facilities and service providers to ensure that appropriate staff, operating equipment and sufficient supplies of food are available so that patrons are not dissuaded from attending future matches.

I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion and it is with great pleasure but also a sense of disappointment that I move this motion today. The last two weeks here in Canberra have been absolute heaven on earth for sports tragics, and I count myself in that category and would venture to suggest that the sports minister does also. For Canberra cricket fans, it has been a dream come true. They have been privileged to be part of two magnificent matches, and it would really not have mattered who had won, although it was somewhat satisfying that both Australian teams were successful. And for Canberra fans, it was an extra bonus, an opportunity to watch two Australian cricket teams without having to travel interstate.

As an opportunity to showcase Canberra to the world, the one-day international match between Australia and the West Indies was outstandingly successful and one that government tourism should have been delighted with. Whether you were at the game or watched the one-day international on television, the oval looked magnificent, the crowds were colourful and well behaved, the commentary was more than generously complimentary to Canberra and the game was a sell-out.

The role that Cricket ACT played in never wavering from their belief that Canberra could stage quality cricket matches cannot be underestimated. I applaud the tenacity of Cricket ACT CEO Mark Vergano and Chairman Ian McNamee in pushing governments, local and federal, and in encouraging major corporate sponsors to get involved. Their hard work has paid off.

It could have been a total success. But it was not, and I regret having to say that. And the issue that has dampened the gloss on the event, and will continue to do so in future matches that are scheduled for the Manuka area, is one that could have been avoided and it is one that has also been brought to government before. That issue, of course, is parking. It is not a new issue to Canberra. It is not even a new issue for Manuka. Even without a sporting event at the oval, parking at Manuka is a nightmare on many days and nights every week, as it is to a lesser extent at Canberra Stadium. But for an oval at which several millions have just been spent to install lights and to provide additional seating, it seems almost *Fawlty Towers* like to not have worked out a better parking plan than extra buses and more parking inspectors.

The headlines the day after the event were shared between how well the oval looked and headlines like “Cricket hit for six for bad parking” and “Fans see red over parking tickets”. And the websites ran hot with abuse over the parking fines.

Let us first look at the issue of additional and free buses. It was a commendable initiative, but surely there was not any belief in government that it would eliminate the parking problems. Bus travel is not a Canberra norm. My colleague Alistair Coe has raised the issue of lack of patronage on Canberra buses for the last four years. So to make them free was not going to change the habits of a lifetime. Transport economists will tell you that Canberra is not designed to encourage a modal shift towards public transport. Canberrans trip-chain in their daily lives, and that behaviour flows over to sporting events.

As writers to the *Canberra Times* highlighted in the days following the game, there were sound reasons why people needed their cars. For some, it was the need to take disabled family members to the game; for others, it was the need to leave early or travel elsewhere after the game. Some had come straight from work and needed to get home after the game.

While it is reasonable to argue that parking on grass verges is a potential traffic hazard, when there is simply nowhere else to go—not close, not within kilometres of the venue—what are people to do? In many instances, the cars were not causing a traffic hazard or obscuring a view. What about those who had travelled from interstate and from regional towns, as many hundreds had? They had no real way of knowing that free buses were available. And the free buses were not available from Cooma or Goulburn.

Unlike other capital cities that have buses, trains, dedicated roads, multistorey car parks and a history of traffic management, Canberra has none and has a resistance to even consider developing a parking strategy. In the 2011 estimates hearings, the opposition raised the issue particularly in respect of Manuka and the enhanced oval, and the government said it noted the recommendation that a parking strategy be developed.

We know Labor's parking strategy. It is there in their policies. They do not believe Canberra people should drive cars. They believe Canberra workers should catch buses. Their parking strategy states that they will reduce the number of car spaces for every 10 city workers from eight to just five.

It would be interesting to have a look at the Assembly estimates in May 2011. I read from the transcript:

MR HANSON: Can I clarify: there is no intent to update the parking in the Manuka surrounds?

MR BARR: There are a number of structured car parking proposals, and park-and-ride opportunities are available. There is also the Manuka group centre. There is parking provision in other areas certainly within walking distance of Manuka but there will not be a major car parking structure built in Manuka Oval. It is certainly not part of the thinking.

MR HANSON: You have no intention of upgrading any of the ground car parking necessarily?

Mr Barr: I do not know what you are referring to by that.

MR HANSON: When people park at Manuka, they often park in the street or they park on some of the school ovals and those surrounds.

Mr Barr: There are designated major event parking areas for Manuka.

MR HANSON: That is right.

Mr Barr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Will they be upgraded?

Mr Barr: No.

There you have it. Labor's solution is to offer city car parks for those travelling from interstate and elsewhere in Canberra to an event at Manuka Oval. Is it a surprise, then, that Labor's parking strategy for Manuka Oval is to bring in more parking inspectors?

I would be interested to know just how many of the cars that were booked—and media reports have it at around 183—were from interstate. When I was heading back to my car I did indeed speak to some people who were interstate visitors, who were absolutely astounded by the welcome they got for having had such a great time and who then were faced with some fairly severe penalties. Giving you a parking ticket is a great souvenir for visitors to this city.

But why should we be surprised? Similar complaints have been received for many of our tourist attractions, Questacon and the National Library being just two other examples. And on any given Saturday throughout the year we have the same issue with parking for every sporting match, from local school sports to major games with interstate teams. What are the parents, for example, supposed to do, other than park on the Canberra Avenue median strip when St Edmund's have their Saturday Rugby matches? There is no alternative parking, once the streets all around the school are taken up, and that is quite early in the day. And I know this from personal experience.

No government, obviously, can solve every parking problem. That is acknowledged, and we do acknowledge that. But Labor has no plan other than to reduce car parking spaces.

Canberra Liberals know the importance of getting transport options right. Unlike Labor and unlike the Greens, we understand that Canberra families need their cars to take their children to school and sport, to shop, to go to work, to visit friends and to attend appointments. Before the last election, we proposed an audit of parking facilities and parking costs across Canberra. Our intentions are clear. Canberra needs more, not fewer, parking spaces across Canberra's major centres. By comparison, Labor's strategy is to provide less, and the Greens' strategy is probably to provide none.

Moving to part 2(b) of my motion, which relates to catering, queuing for food is always an issue at large events, but I am not sure that a crowd of 11,000 or less, as was the case at the Prime Minister's XI, constitutes an unmanageably large crowd. At the first event, negative press after the game centred around parking and food stalls. They ran out of food, and beer hoses broke down. A week later and we had the same complaints, although, in fairness, I am not sure whether the food ran out but certainly the queues were long for both food and drink.

If we want to play in the big league, we need to need to bring our game up for these events. We have other major events coming up in Canberra—the Canberra show, the National Folk Festival and Summernats at EPIC. We have well-attended Brumbies and Raiders games at Canberra Stadium and we do not get the level of complaints after those games.

So I urge the government, before the next major game, which is one close to the heart of the Minister for Sport and Recreation, to develop better strategies for both food and parking.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (12.09): On behalf of the minister for sport, who is unable to be here at this time, I move:

In subparagraph (1)(d), omit all words after “take their cars to the game”, substitute:

- “(1) (e) that the ACT Government has a Traffic and Parking Management Strategy in place to encourage drivers to park legally when attending matches at Manuka Oval;
- (f) that there are over 7500 legal car parks within one kilometre of Manuka Oval;
- (g) that the ACT Government does not condone road users parking illegally in the ACT;
- (h) that free ACTION bus services were available for all ticket holders during the One Day International match;
- (i) that, after some complaints about queues for food and drink at the Prime Minister's XI match, Manuka Oval management increased the amount of catering at the One Day International by 25%;
- (j) that, as part of planning work being completed for the Manuka Precinct, more catering options will be provided as Manuka Oval is further developed;
- (k) the contribution of the ACT and Commonwealth Governments made in delivering the broadcast quality lights, enabling Manuka to host the Australian Cricket Team; and

- (1) the contribution of the Economic Development Directorate, Cox Architects and ActewAGL in delivering the broadcast lights in time for the two matches.”.

The PM’s XI and the one-day international were overwhelmingly successful. The wicket was perfect for limited-over cricket. More than 1,200 runs were scored in the two matches, with plenty of boundaries and sixes and some amazing catches.

The new lights are the best in Australia, perhaps some of the best in the world. As planning minister, I was very pleased to use the powers available to me under the Planning and Development Act to call in and approve the development application for those lights, to enable their timely construction and installation prior to these games proceeding. The lights will help Manuka secure more first-class cricket and AFL games for our city.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the commonwealth government, along with the ACT government, in securing the financing necessary for this very important upgrade of Manuka Oval. It is also important to acknowledge some of the work by others, including Cox Architecture and Ian Smith; the commonwealth government, in particular the Minister for Sport, Senator Lundy; the hardworking officials at the Economic Development Directorate; the contractors engaged; and ActewAGL. All in all, it was a fantastic investment in the future of our city, with the upgrade to an important sporting arena for our city.

I turn to parking and traffic issues. Due to parking and traffic issues in previous years, a traffic and parking management strategy was developed and implemented. This was to ensure that people knew where to park safely. It may come as a surprise to those opposite, but there are over 7½ thousand legal parking spaces within a one-kilometre walk of Manuka Oval. The capacity of Manuka Oval is around 12,000 or so. So for every second person going to Manuka Oval there is a car parking space within one kilometre of the oval. That is a very high level of parking provision. If you go to the MCG or any other major stadium around the country, do you seriously expect that you will be able to find a car park within one kilometre of those major stadia for every car that shows up? For the MCG, it would be over 80,000 car parks. It is an absurd position from those opposite.

The government put in place an extensive program to provide clear information to patrons attending the event and to give them good transport choices. Information on parking and travel was publicised through the Manuka Oval website, the ACTION buses website and Canberra Connect. There were items in the local media, including TV and radio interviews by Mr Guthrie, the General Manager of ACT Venue and Event Services, in the lead-up to the event. There was the use of social media and an eight-page feature on the one-day international in the *Canberra Times*. All outlined very clearly what the parking and other transport choices were for people attending these very popular events. For the one-day international, free travel on ACTION buses was provided for all ticket holders. So all ticket holders, in the price of the ticket, won free travel on ACTION buses to and from the venue. This allowed people

to park in convenient locations like Belconnen, Tuggeranong and the city and then commute to the event. That is a sensible public transport strategy to address the large number of fans attending the event. There were also free shuttles from the city and Woden interchanges before and after the game, and park-and-ride facilities operated.

In addition, the government provided a waiver of the time-limited parking spaces for the PM's XI and one-day international games. Local residents were kept informed and there were mail drops to local residents about road closures, general information about traffic lights and noise, and advance notice of the fact that there would also be a significant fireworks display during the event. Government officials met with local resident groups in advance and advised them about alterations to traffic and parking circumstances.

Quite clearly, this is an issue as much around behaviour change as concerns about parking. The fact is that for any large-scale event there comes a point where you cannot provide every visitor with a car park within 20 metres of the front gate. It cannot be done. It cannot be done for an inner city stadium like Manuka; it is not done for other large inner city stadiums around the country or around the world. Public transport is used to ferry large numbers of people to and from large sporting events and large stadia. That is the change that will occur here in Canberra as we see more and more of these large and popular events.

I note that in his motion Mr Doszpot says that there should be a parking plan. There is one. There it is. It is on the website. It was made available before the event. It outlined very clearly where the parking was, what the arrangements were and what the alternatives were. There is no doubt that there was a clear and comprehensive parking strategy in place.

That does not mean that people can just park wherever they like. People were booked. They were booked for parking illegally, and they were warned in advance that that would occur. People were warned in advance that parking inspectors were going to be present on the day to make sure that dangerous, illegal parking was appropriately responded to. People were warned. This should have been no surprise, because it was made public well in advance. Indeed, the media release released by the event organisers on 30 January said:

You are encouraged to leave the car at home and take a bus to the match. Parking restrictions on some streets will be lifted on the day, but parking places are very limited. And be warned: parking officers will be out patrolling and looking for cars that are parked illegally.

If you want to drive, the best parking options include the Kingston Bus Depot Markets and Manuka Swimming Pool. And don't forget the Park and Ride options mentioned above.

That was very clear advice from the event organisers so it should have been no surprise. The garden city is not a car park; you cannot just park wherever you want. Parking restrictions apply; they are sensible and reasonable. That is no different from any other growing city.

Let me turn to the catering issues. Improvements were made after complaints about queues at the PM's XI. Malfunctions on some of the beer equipment at the PM's XI were fixed for the one-day international. However, the consumption of food and drink exceeded those for previous PM's XI matches, and this did put more pressure on catering. The previous beer record at the cricket match at Manuka was 110 kegs. This year the PM's XI reached 140. The one-dayer hit that record for a six, with 210 kegs of beer being sold.

Other improvements for the one-day international included a 25 per cent increase in food and beverage facilities, equal to about an extra 30 metres of front-of-store space. So there was a very clear response to concerns about queuing. Extra bar facilities at the main concession area behind the Bradman stand were put in place; more staff were employed to assist with moving lines faster; the bar opposite the Menzies stand used a multi-pour system to replace single taps; more facilities with the food menu on the bar registers provided the ability to queue once for food and alcohol, reducing the need to queue; and there was an extra food van. So the government did respond: Events ACT did respond quite comprehensively to patron concerns about waiting times to access food and drink.

Manuka Oval has only a limited amount of permanent infrastructure, but the government is proposing significant upgrades for Manuka Oval as part of our master planning process. They will include further improvements to spectator amenities, building permanent kitchens for the oval and providing better catering facilities.

This is all about making the transition to Manuka becoming a pre-eminent first-class international sporting event venue. We are making the investment. As a government, as a Labor government, we are proud of the investment we are making in providing better facilities so that Canberrans can enjoy international sporting fixtures—and see more of those fixtures played here in the national capital—and improving further the spectator experience. We think we are on the right track. We think we are providing an outstanding venue. There is further work to be done, and that work will be done as part of the master planning process this government has put in place.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (12.19): Mr Corbell, it is no wonder that Mr Barr would not speak on his own amendment, because it is full of flaws. They sold you a very good dummy pass on this one. You did not correct a lot of the errors of the amendment that Mr Barr wanted to make.

First of all, the match that we are talking about was played on a weekday. Yes, you are correct: there are a number of legal car parks about. But have you tried to get into a legal car park during a working day? The car park is already full. What is going to happen to all the people who you are saying should be using these car parks within a kilometre of the stadium? Your premise is right; your logic is totally flawed. We have 7,500 legal car parks which are occupied by workers and by shoppers in the precincts we are talking about.

Let me go to your statements regarding parking waivers. I parked at Manuka. I did not see any sign of parking waivers anywhere. I had to pay. I did not see any notices up; I

did not hear any such comment. And I am a local. What about visitors who are coming? How would they handle all of these issues? We had quite a substantial number of visitors. That is one of the reasons why you, the government, Mr Barr, have been selling all of the major events. I applaud that; they attract visitors. But to attract visitors we have got to do something to make sure they come back again.

We will not be supporting the amendment. Our motion is about developing a proper parking management plan for the Manuka precinct. We agree that there is not an easy solution, but there are certainly areas which could be utilised in a short-term capacity that may be free space. Some free areas of land which were utilised around Manuka Oval in past years have gradually been filled in and developed, but there are other areas that could be used for short-term development.

You mentioned the Melbourne Cricket Ground and that people do not expect to be able to park 20 metres from it. I can assure you that I was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a little while ago, and they do have parking spaces around that are utilised for the short-term purposes that we are talking about. So let us be just a bit more logical about this. We are suggesting that this successful event should not be turned into another situation like we have had for the last two matches. That is the reason for our motion.

As far as your legal car parks go, that is just ridiculous obfuscation. We are talking about weekdays. There may be some logic in saying that on the weekends, on a Saturday night match at Manuka Oval, there are a lot of car parking spaces about. But even then, a lot of those car parking spaces are filled by people who go to various entertainments around Canberra, so there are limitations to the so-called logic that you are using about the number of legal car parks available.

The reality is that there is no short-term plan for the Manuka precinct. And by the way, the shopkeepers were very much disadvantaged when the waivers that you claim were given were put into effect. What happens to people who want to come shopping at Manuka when people are parking there for longer than expected? The shopkeepers' businesses are affected.

The logic just does not make sense. As a consequence, we will not be supporting the amendment.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (12.23): I thank Mr Doszpot for bringing on this motion today. It is a great opportunity to reflect on what has been, as he well described, a sports tragics festival over the last couple of weeks.

Certainly the two cricket matches at Manuka Oval were, in my opinion, outstanding successes, in terms of the number of people who attended and the quality of the matches. I think that on both occasions the crowds who went had a fairly good time. We were certainly blessed with great weather on both occasions, which no doubt added to it. The TV coverage of the one-day international was also an excellent tourism advertisement for Canberra: the aerial shots and the way the commentators talked about both the ground and the city were tremendous for Canberra.

That said, I will be supporting Mr Barr's amendment to this motion. I think that some of the points that Mr Doszpot seeks to make just do not really cut it in terms of what our expectations should be. In a growing city, it is not reasonable to expect to get to every single major event by just driving there and parking right outside the front door. It is not feasible to put 10½ thousand people, as there were, into Manuka Oval and have everyone able to just rock up and park as close as they like.

We need to generate a different expectation around some of these events. The recent open day at the arboretum is in perfect juxtaposition to the position that Mr Doszpot has taken in this motion. On that day ACTION buses moved somewhere between 10,000 and 11,000 people from sites around Canberra to the arboretum, because there is not parking capability at the arboretum. We want the arboretum as it exists to be a forest, not a series of car parks. Therefore there is limited scope for people to be able to drive there.

On days when there is a normal number of tourists, that is going to be fine, but with 10,000 to 15,000 people estimated for that day, people could not just drive there. I think it is going to be the same for Manuka Oval. At the moment, there are only three or four major events at Manuka Oval a year. We have got the three or four Giants games and the odd cricket match. I do not think that it is feasible to talk about building a multistorey car park, which I think is what Mr Doszpot suggested, for that number of occasions. We need to have an expectation that for those big events we will take a different approach.

ACTION was able to shift into and out of the arboretum around the same number of people that attended the cricket. Effectively, they shifted the entire crowd that attended the cricket into and out of the arboretum in one day. There were 87 recorded bus trips over the day, with peak access between 9 and 10 am and a peak in people leaving between 12 and 12.30—I guess they wanted to get home for lunch. We had popular pick-up stations at Bruce stadium, Woden interchange, the city interchange, the Treasury building and Stromlo forest. I have been told that ACTION buses advised that they were overwhelmed with the positive comments regarding the free shuttle bus: all the customers that they got feedback from were extremely satisfied. Similar comments were picked up in the customer surveys that TAMS undertook on the day.

Mr Coe: Is that the arboretum or is it Manuka?

MR RATTENBURY: I am talking about the arboretum. This is the experience we had at the arboretum. The observation I make is that it is possible that that is the sort of approach we need to try and generate for events such as the Giants matches and the major cricket games.

I accept Mr Doszpot's point that not everybody will be able to take public transport to the cricket. Some people will need cars. He cited examples of people with disability and people arriving at different times. That is fine. But there is parking around Manuka. On your point about spots being filled by workers during the day, I think that for people coming later there is a turnover of those spots. It is not about saying that everybody has to go by bus, but we certainly need to generate an alternative approach.

Not everybody can drive. There simply is not the physical space around Manuka Oval. I can assure you that if we start trying to do that, the residents in that area are going to be onto Mr Dospot, complaining about that. We see it already with some of the games. I have received complaints about people parking on median strips during AFL matches and the like. It is just not okay for people to be parking on the median strip. It damages the trees; it is unsightly.

These are the sorts of issues that the government needs to try and balance. Rather than simply saying that we can have an expectation that everyone can drive there, I think we need to try and take an alternative approach. That is why I support the amendment that has been brought forward by Mr Barr. He has identified some of those necessities.

On the issue of the catering, clearly there was a problem. Mr Barr's amendment acknowledges that and indicates the alternative work that has been in place to ensure that does not happen in the future. Frankly, at a limited-over international match you do not want to spend six or 10 overs standing in the queue waiting to get refreshments. I think that the observations made in Mr Barr's amendment reasonably acknowledge that it did not work as well as it should have at the Prime Minister's XI. Steps were taken to make improvements for the one-day international, but there is work being done to make more permanent improvements at Manuka Oval as the oval is upgraded.

On that basis, I will be supporting the amendment moved by Mr Barr.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.29 to 2.30 pm.

Questions without notice

Auditor-General—audit findings

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the Auditor-General's report on 2011-12 financial audits noted:

Agencies resolved ... 55 percent of previously reported audit findings. This is significantly less than the ... 66 percent resolved in 2010-11.

Chief Minister, can you explain to the Assembly why your government resolved only 55 per cent of audit findings from the previous year?

MS GALLAGHER: Financial audits usually sit within the purview of the Treasurer but I can provide some information. With all audits—I can come back more specifically to the question that Mr Hanson has asked—and in all the audits that I deal with there is usually a rolling process of implementing audits. The agencies and directorates take a lot of notice, as do ministers, of audit findings and completing audit recommendations. As they complete recommendations there are usually a whole range of new recommendations that come through from the next audit.

As to whether there are specific reasons why a certain amount were not finished within that reporting period, I will take some further advice on it. I do not have it before me at this point in time.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, can you please explain why your government has allowed the percentage of audit findings which were unresolved to increase from the 2011 financial year to 2012?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. I am sure there is a reasonable explanation for it, and I will come back to you. I think, from the advice before me, agencies' compliance with the whole-of-government reporting timetable improved, with 90 per cent compliance in 2011-12 compared to 74 per cent in 2010-11.

Mr Smyth: You are reading from the wrong brief.

MS GALLAGHER: I have got some advice here, Mr Smyth. Occasionally when questions get asked I do like to be helpful and answer the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: The minister will answer the question.

Members interjecting—

MS GALLAGHER: I try more than you deserve. Let us just leave it at that. I try more than you deserve but there are—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, deserving or not is not the issue.

MS GALLAGHER: That is right. I have had to get above that. But I would say that we take Auditor-General's reports very seriously. We do, as individual ministers, take advice around completed audits, and I certainly know, from all the audits that pass my desk, I look at the number of urgent recommendations and how they are progressing, the new audit findings and how they are progressing, and it is the same with the financial audits.

I guess what I feel Mr Hanson is suggesting is that we are not taking these seriously and we are not implementing good practice, and that is not the case. But as to the specifics of the question, there will be a reasonable answer and I will provide it to you.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, why were 38 of the 2011 audit findings not even partially resolved in the 2012 year?

MS GALLAGHER: I think I will cover that in my answer when I come back with more detail.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, how can the public have any faith that you will address any issues if your failure rate continues to increase as it has done?

MS GALLAGHER: I just do not accept the question that the member has put. We take great care with our responses to audits from the Auditor-General. Some of them will take longer than others to implement. Some of them are more urgent than others. Some come with greater risk than others and require that they be implemented.

As to the specifics of the question, there will be a reasonable answer to the suggestions that the opposition are putting. I do not accept that we do not follow good practice in relation to implementing audit recommendations or that directorates are not focused on them. They are, and I think that overall the audit rated the financial statements as good or satisfactory and this was in line with previous audit findings.

Art—public

MR COE: My question is to the Treasurer. The rollover of undisbursed appropriation under section 16B of the Financial Management Act 1996 that you tabled yesterday noted:

\$200,000 for Public Art Scheme—Projects have been delayed awaiting final approval of locations for artworks, artists' schedules, and the provision of defects payments to artists 12 months following installation.

Treasurer, how much of the public art funds goes to local artists and how much goes to other artists?

MR BARR: I will have to take that question on notice; I do not have that information in front of me.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Treasurer, can you detail what is meant by a provision of defects payment, how much they are, who they are being paid to and why?

MR BARR: Again, perhaps the question is best answered in detail. I will take it on notice. It is the sort of question you would anticipate coming as a question on notice rather than without in this context.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, how much are delays awaiting final approvals of locations for artworks costing the territory?

MR BARR: I imagine very little, but I will take some advice on that matter. Whilst I appreciate the opposition's interest in public art, this level of detail in relation to this particular rollover is not something that you would ordinarily have in front of you in question time. I will take some advice and get back to the member.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, how much is the element of artists' schedule costing the territory?

MR BARR: I refer the member to my previous answer.

MADAM SPEAKER: Treasurer, does it mean you are taking it on notice?

MR BARR: Yes, I will.

Children and young people—abuse

MS PORTER: My question is to the Chief Minister. Can the Chief Minister update the Assembly on the progress of the commonwealth's establishment of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and what arrangements are being made in relation to the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Ms Porter for the question. This is a very serious matter, with the royal commission being established by the federal government and with respect to how it will operate across various jurisdictions. The royal commission will focus on systemic failure in Australian institutions and it will also ensure that experiences of survivors of child sexual abuse in these institutions are heard and acknowledged and that appropriate support is provided. It will be making recommendations on how to improve laws, policies and practices to prevent and better respond to child sexual abuse in institutionalised care.

Six commissioners from different regions of Australia with extensive experience, qualifications and expertise in children's rights, mental health, law enforcement and disadvantage have been appointed to undertake the commission. The terms of reference were released in early January 2013 after broad consultation with the opposition, the states, non-profit groups, churches and victims.

The commissioners met in mid-January 2013 for initial discussions on how the commission will operate and determine its processes. The commonwealth has proposed to amend the Royal Commissions Act so that formal hearings do not require all commissioners to be present.

For the ACT, the commonwealth government will rely upon the territories power under section 122 of the constitution in its application to the royal commission. The territories power allows the commission full authority to operate the royal commission in the ACT. This approach has been resolved bilaterally with the commonwealth as it reduces legal complexity and risk.

The commission will make policy recommendations about how we as a community can better protect children. It will not have the powers to directly prosecute but will work closely with state and territory authorities.

The commission will provide a voice to survivors and ensure that their experiences are not only heard but also acknowledged and validated, and it is hoped that by sharing these experiences it will help victims of such abuse to move forward whilst also forming a key component in the development of effective policies and strategies. The commission is expected to produce an interim report by June 2014 which will provide an update on progress.

The ACT government does acknowledge the suffering endured by victims in institutions and systems that failed to protect them and welcomes the opportunity to assist the royal commission in preventing this from ever occurring again.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Can the Chief Minister advise what arrangements have been put in place for people who would like to contact the commission?

MS GALLAGHER: Since the announcement of the establishment of the royal commission, I think it is fair to say that there has been, certainly with me in my role as Chief Minister, a lot of discussion about people coming forward who may not have come forward in the past and how to have their story heard. I know that a number of non-government organisations around Canberra are noticing that.

The commission has responded very quickly and established a 1800 telephone number for callers to contact and leave their details so that the commission, once they have all their staff available, will be in a position to respond. There is also a website where people can leave their details for contact and get information and updates around the commission.

I think it is important that, in the early days of the commission, as much as we can for people coming forward and in our roles as members in this place, we are facilitating their conduct with the royal commission and the way we are managing that. All states and territories, as I understand it, are working with the royal commission, but we do, in this instance, need to make sure that people are being supported in accessing that 1800 number and the website and then hand it over to the commission whilst it is completing its work.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Chief Minister, could you advise what provisions have been made for support to victims in the ACT?

MS GALLAGHER: This is something that the government is watching very closely. I know that the Minister for Community Services has been in contact and, I think, has visited the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, as has Minister Rattenbury. I have certainly

visited them recently, in the last month, to hear from them around what they are seeing. I think there is a level of concern and angst in the non-government sector about the level of demand that will be generated once the royal commission commences its hearings and stories are being told and being reported in the media, as that always does generate, I think, a level of anxiety for people that have previously come forward but also those that may not have come forward in the past. This is something we will keep our eye on.

The commonwealth has stated that additional funding will be available to support victims during the royal commission process. The royal commission has also said it will have resources available to support witnesses. We have a number of non-government organisations and, indeed, services like the AFP sexual assault and child abuse team here in the ACT. Of course, organisations like Lifeline, MensLine and the Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault are all there and we will be watching and listening and hearing from them about what they are seeing. If there is any way that we can respond to meet that additional pressure, we will.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Chief Minister, how many instances of abuse have been reported, investigated or have occurred in any ACT government organisation, facility or service since 2001?

MS GALLAGHER: Here was the opportunity to provide a bit of information and Mr Smyth seeks to make it political. I think the implication is this: by 2001 how many people during this course of government, how many children during this course of government, have had complaints or concerns around sexual abuse raised? There would be some, Mr Smyth. There would be some.

Mr Hanson: There would be some.

MS GALLAGHER: Surprise, surprise, Mr Hanson. I do not carry that figure around in my head, either. This was serious question about a royal commission into institutionalised care and Mr Smyth chooses to make fun of it by trying to put the pressure on us about what has happened—

Mr Coe: Point of order.

MS GALLAGHER: since 2001. This is what we expect.

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, there is a point of order.

Mr Coe: Madam Speaker, I ask that you draw the Chief Minister's attention to the content of the reasonable question and ask that she be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: The question, Chief Minister, was about had there been any instances and can you answer whether there have been and how many. Could I request you to be directly to that? I think there is the point of order.

MS GALLAGHER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In assisting the Assembly, what I will do is come back with the numbers since 1989, Mr Smyth, because that would be appropriate if you were not playing games with this. It would have been appropriate to say: since ACT self-government has been established, how many reports of institutionalised abuse have occurred? Then I would happily provide it. But you chose not to. You chose to politicise something that should not be politicised—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, I have asked you to be directly relevant.

MS GALLAGHER: and I will take it on notice from 1989.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth! Members! Mr Smyth, you do not have the call. Mr Doszpot, you have the call.

Schools—canteens

MR DOSZPOT: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. I draw the minister's attention to the article in today's *Canberra Times* that suggests that school canteens will close because of such things as too much government regulation. Minister, what were the outcomes of the ministerial school canteens task force that met last year to address this issue, and have they been implemented?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Doszpot for his question. Gee, that was unexpected—a question given to Mr Doszpot on the front page of the *Canberra Times*. The school canteens—

Mr Doszpot: You can't help yourself, can you? That was a question—

MS BURCH: Well, neither can you, Mr Doszpot. The information contained in the *Canberra Times* article around the canteen association closing in the near future is news to me. The task force has been meeting. It was established by my predecessor last year, and it has been working closely with canteens and parent and citizen associations and groups over that time.

I have asked the directorate to provide to me in the first half of this year a report from the task force with some activities that can be implemented in the short to medium term, noting, of course, that this government went to the election with a \$1 million commitment to support the P&C association with canteen viability. So there are two pieces of work: there is our commitment of \$1 million over four years—the ACT Liberals did not offer any support to canteens—and then there is other work that will be identified through the school system and through the P&C councils.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what is the purpose of the \$1 million promise by Labor in last year's election campaign, that you have just touched on, for school canteens?

MS BURCH: If Mr Doszpot had had any communication with the P&C council over last year, he too would have known that the P&C council and the canteen associations had some concerns about the viability of canteens. There were about 86 canteens, about 51 operated by P&Cs. I think there are about 20 that are outsourced.

Canteens have changed. Certainly canteens have changed since I was a student. They have changed since I was a volunteer at my kids' canteens, and rightly so. Some of those changes have included a focus on healthy foods, a focus on food safety. These are right and proper changes to have occurred.

Our million dollar investment—and it was a commitment and we are going through that budget process, and it was earmarked to start in the 2013-14 year—was a two-pronged approach. It was to look at, on some advice from the P&C association, online purchasing and buying power but also—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MS BURCH: They are not interested, Madam Speaker, so I have finished my answer.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Coe, Mr Seselja, that was far too noisy. Your voices do carry. A supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: My question is to the minister for education. What is the government's preferred model for school canteens—that is, should they be assisted, to be run by the school, or does the minister have a preference about whether they are contracted out?

MS BURCH: I think my preference is for a school canteen to be the decision of the school and the P&C community. It is not for government to come in and impose a model on the school community. Mr Doszpot has made an implication in his questioning that we are interfering too much. And by Mrs Jones's question, it seems that she wants us to interfere a little bit more. These are decisions for the school. We have put a million—

Members interjecting—

MS BURCH: When they are prepared to listen, I will continue.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! Ms Porter has the floor.

Ms Gallagher interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister! I have just called you to order for one of your own members. Ms Porter has the floor.

MS PORTER: Minister, did you note the good work that was happening in the Fraser primary school and, I believe, the P&C canteen, as reported in the *Canberra Times* this morning?

MS BURCH: I want to congratulate that school on the great work that it has done. It is a school that did not have a canteen there for a while, and certainly the school community got in and supported a change in that. It is wonderful to see. It is a vibrant canteen offering very solid, good food options for the children. This is what the focus should be about. These are decisions made by the local school community with a focus on healthy food options for our children. I do not think there would be anybody in this place that would not like to see healthy food options provided to our children in schools. The information and education that we support through the school curriculum and through life choices, when we are faced with increasing childhood obesity, should be supported not only in theory within the school curriculum but in practice within the school canteens. I congratulate that school.

Electricity—feed-in tariff

MR SMYTH: Madam Speaker, my question is for the Treasurer. The rollover of undisbursed appropriation under section 16B of the Financial Management Act 1996 that you tabled yesterday noted:

\$405,000 for the Feed-In Tariff Stage 3—This project has been delayed due to the complexities in assessing each application for Large Scale Renewable Energy Generation. The funds are required to finalise the large scale feed-in tariff, including the auction process with the project due to be complete by June 2013 ...

Treasurer, how is it that the government announced the successful tenderer for the large-scale feed-in tariff scheme last year without these elements of the scheme completed?

MR BARR: The shadow treasurer may be aware of the timing issues associated with the payment of particular invoices from time to time that might fall into a new financial year. My understanding in this instance is that it relates to the tidying up of some administrative arrangements associated with that particular project. The project was completed and a very good outcome for the territory occurred. It is possible, of course, that for projects that have particularly large appropriations some invoices may fall into the new financial year and be paid accordingly.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Treasurer, how much will this delay cost the territory?

MR BARR: I do not believe there will be any cost.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Coe.

MR COE: Treasurer, can you detail how funding an auction process can cost \$405,000?

Mr Barr: Can you repeat the question?

MR COE: Yes. Can you detail how funding an auction process can cost \$405,000?

MR BARR: This is not a project that I ran myself. Certainly I can seek some advice—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members!

MR BARR: I can seek some advice from the directorate around the costs associated with that particular process. But in all large procurement, it is reasonable to anticipate that, particularly for large construction processes, the procurement and other costs associated with projects can be up to 10 per cent of the total cost. In relation to an auction, there would clearly be some legal advice and requirements associated with that, as well as a range of other costs, I imagine, associated with the ongoing procurement.

I will provide for Mr Coe some further information in relation to that particular auction, but I do not think it would be unusual for there to be costs of that size associated with a procurement that is quite significant.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Could the Treasurer please advise what are the benefits to the territory that will arise from this project?

MR BARR: Most importantly, the ability to generate a large amount of renewable energy at an effective price. One of the important elements of this particular project in the context of its being a reverse option was a very competitive process bringing international investment to the territory. The particular firm that was successful, I understand, is a Spanish company with a strong record of large-scale solar delivery. It is significant investment in the territory economy, will provide for ongoing employment opportunities and will certainly make a significant contribution to the territory's renewable energy targets and our greenhouse gas reduction targets.

It is important that the territory is in a position to attract national and international investment, and we should be encouraging such investment. I am surprised, I must admit, to hear the little mutterings coming from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that international investment is not welcome in the ACT.

Bushfires—management

DR BOURKE: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, recently the ACT experienced some of the worst fire danger days for many years. Could the minister please outline to members how the government and the Emergency Services Agency dealt with these elevated fire danger conditions?

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call the minister, I would like to consult with the Clerk. There is an item on the notice paper, the program for this evening. I know that we have changed the standing orders. The Clerk has reminded me that we have taken out the standing order about anticipating debate, so I shall call the minister for emergency services.

MR CORBELL: I thank Dr Bourke for his interest in relation to this very important matter. The significant reforms implemented by the government over the past 10 years have made a substantial difference to how we prepare for and respond to the types of elevated fire danger days we have experienced over the recent January period.

Since 2003 the ACT has, thankfully, seen relatively few bushfires. However, we have seen significant fire danger days, with the region and the territory coming under severe and above average fire risk. This was particularly the case on 8, 11, 12 and 18 January this year, during which the territory saw strong north-westerly wind conditions and temperatures soaring into the very high 30s, in extremely dry conditions. This has been, of course, in the context of a build-up of significant grassland fuels over the previous two summers, followed by relatively dry periods leading into those summers.

The fire danger index in the ACT exceeded 50 on 11 and 12 January, indicating a severe fire danger rating. The fire danger index exceeded 75 on 8 and 18 January, which is an extraordinary fire danger index.

In the lead-up to this year's fire season, therefore, we have seen comprehensive preparation by the ACT Rural Fire Service and the ACT emergency service personnel overall. Between 8 and 18 January the ACT RFS responded to 42 bush and grass fires in the ACT and support was also provided to the New South Wales Rural Fire Service for the Cooma, Bungendore and Yass fires. A total fire ban was declared for these periods.

All ACT RFS tankers were fully crewed. All ACT Fire and Rescue personnel were rostered to crew appliances and provide other assistance as required during these extreme fire weather days. This included the crewing of all ACT Rural Fire Service and ACT Fire and Rescue appliances during these dangerous conditions.

In addition, the Hume air base was fully activated, with at one point 12 aircraft stationed here to support both ACT and New South Wales operations. Approximately 126 aircraft hours were undertaken for suppression, crew deployment and observation of the Namadgi national park fires that started on 6 January. A fixed-wing bomber retardant base was also established at Canberra airport to support regional firefighting operations.

The emergency coordination centre at the ESA headquarters was stood up on four occasions during 8, 11, 12 and 18 January, and during this time representatives from all ACT government directorates were in attendance. There were liaison officers in attendance from external agencies, including Defence, ACTEW Water for electricity, water and gas, the National Capital Authority, the commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and Telstra. Emergency alert operators were placed on standby. Incident management teams were activated for six days, with a total of 64 staff working over the 8 to 18 January period.

There was a strong media messaging presence during this time, including regular updates from the ACT Rural Fire Service chief officer as well as the issuing of numerous alerts and updates via the ESA website and through its social media presence. The ESA also proactively took the decision to significantly upgrade its website capacity eightfold to allow the ESA website to have the capacity to handle over two million visits per hour should the demand increase to that level.

Of course we have also seen ESA personnel deployed to assist with recent fires in New South Wales and interstate, and I commend all the personnel engaged in those very important operations. (*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, what differences in operational preparation and fire readiness were employed this January compared to January 2003?

MR CORBELL: I think the most telling difference for me, having watched and observed the response of our emergency services personnel during the period over January, was the very clear and definitive strategy of early and aggressive attack of fires in the Namadgi national park. You will recall that we saw multiple fires commence in the Namadgi national park, and members may also recall that it was anticipated that within three to four days of those fires commencing there was going to be very severe fire danger weather with strong north-westerly winds, dry conditions and high temperatures.

I commend the efforts of the ACT ESA and all of its services—the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue, the SES and Ambulance Service—in aggressively tackling those fires. We saw immediate and strong attack, including deployment of vehicles on the ground, including overnight presence. We saw the immediate deployment of bulldozer and other earthmoving appliance resources. We saw the immediate deployment of aerial firefighting appliances—helicopters—to waterbomb those fires early and aggressively. We also saw the deployment of our now very experienced and highly regarded remote area firefighting teams—or RAF crews, as they are known—being helicoptered in to one of those remote fires and tackling it early.

As a result, we got all of those fires out. We got them out quickly, promptly, before they could grow, particularly under those very adverse conditions that were anticipated in the next three to four days. For me as minister, if we talk about nothing else, the efforts of our personnel on that ground to aggressively attack early those

lightning-strike fires in Namadgi national park says it all about the lessons that have been learnt and what we now know we need to do to deal with those types of fires. *(Time expired.)*

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Minister, what is the outlook for the rest of the bushfire season?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Berry for the question. The Bureau of Meteorology is continuing to predict average daytime temperatures and average rainfall over the period February to April this year. The general weather trend for the foreseeable future appears to be indicating something similar to recent patterns of predominantly dry with warm to hot temperatures and intermittent storm activity that will bring some brief respite but does not ameliorate the overall bushfire risk. For this reason the full suite of the government's emergency planning arrangements are prepared in anticipation of such conditions.

Grassland fuel loads have increased significantly due to the above average rains experienced in the territory over the past two seasons. The drought indices that determine fuel moisture—that is, the level of potentially dry fuels available to burn—are very high, indicating that fuels are still very dry and ready to burn. Grass curing rates are still between 70 and 100 per cent, with the majority at around 90 per cent. Therefore, any fires starting in the grasslands will spread quickly and will significantly increase in their intensity and rate of spread on very hot, dry and windy days. As a consequence, the Rural Fire Service has been prepared for this bushfire season predominated by grassfire. The prolonged heat during January has highlighted the ongoing curing of these grasslands and we still need to be alert and prepared for the remainder of this bushfire season.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, has the debrief of those RSF staff and volunteers who have participated in the activities of 8 January this year occurred? If not, why not?

MR CORBELL: I am not aware whether it has occurred or not. Obviously, a debrief is a standard practice and I will seek some further advice on that issue.

Schools—early intervention program

MR SESELJA: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training and it relates to the ETD half-yearly performance reports. Minister, 299 students with developmental delays and disabilities have enrolled in early intervention programs in the first six months of the financial year. Only 400 places are allocated for the year. Given that disability diagnosis can happen throughout the year, what gives you confidence that the number of children requiring this service will not exceed the budgeted 400, given that it is already nearly 75 per cent of that number?

MS BURCH: I thank Mr Seselja for his question. I do not have the half-yearly report in front of me, but I do have confidence that the department manages the referrals to

that support unit. I have nothing in front of me to say that there are any concerns about the management of those students requiring that additional support. If there is something, I am quite happy to bring it back, but, in the scheme of things, what I have in front of me is that there are no concerns and the department would manage it within resources.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Seselja.

MR SESELJA: What evidence did the directorate rely on to reduce the 2012-13 allocation from the previous year's allocation of 450?

MS BURCH: It is my understanding that these annual targets reflect practice. If they have amended a goal or a target, that would have been on historic evidence within the directorate about the use and the pressures on that particular unit. That is what I am assuming. If that is wrong, I am quite happy to come back and correct it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what assurances can you provide families that, in the event that demand exceeds the budgeted 400 places, additional moneys and program support will be forthcoming?

MS BURCH: I have every confidence that the department would respond to those pressures over the 84-plus schools and, I think, 40,000 students across ACT government schools. Certainly, pressures would change over time. Year to year there will be different pressures as students enrol in the system or exit out of the system. Those pressures would change. Nothing has come to me to say that students are turned away and do not receive the support that they need within the system. In fact, I would say that our education system is one of those that need to be commended for its response to students and families, for the support in place and what they offer.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Doszpot.

MR DOSZPOT: Minister, what contingent provisions have been made to meet the cost of providing additional places?

MS BURCH: I think I have answered that in saying that this is a large organisation that has different pressure points across a number of students, whether it is very early in the early years, in primary years or in secondary years. But there is nothing in front of me. If you have a concern, Mr Doszpot, I am quite happy for you to write to me and articulate your concern.

Mr Doszpot: I would like you to take it on notice if you cannot answer it now.

MS BURCH: No. I would rather you come to me with particular concerns that you have. Your question was general in the sense of what contingencies are in place to respond.

Mr Coe: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order, Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: Contrary to what the minister just said, the question was not general. The question was in fact about the contingencies in place. I think she should be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: Could you stop the clock, please, Clerk. Mr Doszpot, I did not actually hear all of your question because your voice does not travel a great distance. Could you repeat the question, please?

Mr Doszpot: Sure.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Chief Minister, I am asking Mr Doszpot to repeat the question because I cannot hear him. It is not aided by your interjection or Mr Coe's.

Mr Doszpot: What contingent provisions have you made, minister, to meet the cost of providing additional places? That is relevant to the questions that we asked at the outset.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I think that Mr Coe's point of order is correct. I would like you to answer the question: are there contingencies?

MS BURCH: Across a broad range of areas within the education and training department I reckon there is absolutely room for contingencies. So the answer to your question is that there are contingencies available, Mr Doszpot.

Economy—support

MR GENTLEMAN: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you provide an update to the Assembly on what the government is doing to support the ACT economy?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Gentleman for the question.

Mr Coe: Tax them until they bleed, I think.

MR BARR: I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for the interjection before I have even begun my answer. The government is indeed undertaking a number of policy directions in order to underpin the health of the territory economy. These include, of course, prudent management of the territory's budget, the implementation of our business development strategy, and a personal favourite and one I know that hurts the opposition every time I mention it: ongoing tax reform. Investment in infrastructure—

Mr Hanson: Shame!

MR BARR: Well would the Leader of the Opposition shout “shame” because it is well known that when it comes to tax reform, when it comes to moving away from inefficient indirect taxes, the Liberal Party have their heads in the sand. Their interest is in promoting an inefficient tax system, it would seem. Their interest is in ensuring—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, could I draw your attention to the terms of the question, which were: what are you doing to support the ACT economy? Could I ask you to be concise and directly relevant?

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Tax reform is a very important part of that, as is investment in infrastructure and the ongoing promotion of private sector investment in our city. I think it is worth noting that, in spite of what has been a difficult local economic environment and a period of tight commonwealth expenditure in the territory economy, the key economic indicators for the ACT show that the policy settings the government has in place are indeed helping the territory economy to prosper. We have the third lowest unemployment rate in the country, behind only the mining boom states of WA and the Northern Territory. We maintain the second highest participation rate in the labour force—again, behind only the Northern Territory at 72.7 per cent. We have unemployment well below the national average.

Employment in the territory grew by 0.6 per cent in the 2011-12 fiscal year, which was the third strongest employment growth rate in the country. The latest gross state product data shows solid output growth for the territory and that we performed very well compared to non-mining jurisdictions in Australia. Our GSP rose by 3.5 per cent, the fourth highest growth rate in the country, again behind only WA, the Northern Territory and Queensland, whose growth was fuelled by mining.

We continue to record the highest gross household disposable income per capita—over \$72,000, which is just a tick below 70 per cent higher than the national average of \$42,392. We have recorded the third highest gross household disposable income growth—again, behind only those boom states of Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Population growth has been strong, with growth of 1.5 per cent projected into the coming fiscal year, which will of course support economic activity. I note that this is above our historical long-run average growth rate of 1.25 per cent.

We are taking a number of significant steps to boost confidence amongst business to support jobs and to increase the productive capacity of the economy. This includes a four-year \$1.7 billion infrastructure program that will support jobs in our economy. We are also adopting a market-based approach to economic development. Government intervention is limited and strategic in terms of leveraging the territory’s competitive advantages. An example of this is our recent \$12 million four-year funding investment in the national ICT centre of excellence. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that Canberra is today hosting NICTA’s annual technology outreach event—(*Time expired.*)

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Can the Treasurer outline any threats to the economy?

MR BARR: There are indeed some threats facing the territory economy. The global economy remains volatile and the territory is not immune from this. Since the global financial crisis, households are saving more and this weaker household consumption is impacting on the GST pool. The higher exchange rate is impacting on a number of industries in the territory, particularly education and tourism but also our manufacturing sector.

In addition, structural changes in the national revenue base are continuing to impact on federal tax receipts. However, Madam Speaker, the single greatest threat to the ACT economy is the election of an Abbott government. Tony Abbott has confirmed and his representatives in the ACT, current and willing, have both confirmed that 20,000 public service jobs will be lost in this city.

Senator Humphries said, “There is a particular challenge facing the people of Canberra in the next three years.” There is a particular challenge facing Senator Humphries in the next three weeks but there is a particular challenge facing the people of Canberra in the next three years, particularly, as Mr Humphries said, if there is a change in government.

Senator Humphries said that Canberra “will be the subject of some very tough decisions by an incoming government”. The senator went on to say, “It is very clear that some of the decisions made in the process of an incoming government will be very difficult for Canberra.” So from the mouth of the current Canberra Liberals’ federal representative, tough times are coming for our economy. There is no escaping this reality that the Liberal Party are the party of recession for the ACT economy.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question. Ms Porter has the floor to ask her question without being drowned out by members of her own side or the opposition.

MS PORTER: Treasurer, what is the nature of the proposed cuts that you have just mentioned that will have an impact, and will the impact be similar from the cuts in 1996?

MADAM SPEAKER: Could you just repeat the question, please, Ms Porter?

Mr Smyth: On a point of order, is that a hypothetical—

MADAM SPEAKER: I was just asking Ms Porter to—

MS PORTER: Treasurer, what is the nature of the proposed cuts that he has just mentioned and will the impact be similar from the cuts in 1996?

MADAM SPEAKER: I would submit that the nature of proposed cuts by a future hypothetical government is not within the ministerial responsibility of the Treasurer.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, on your ruling, there are a series of public statements that have been made and the question also asked me to reflect upon historical outcomes in the territory economy which, as Treasurer, I am able to do.

MADAM SPEAKER: I have made a ruling and my ruling is that the question relates to the election of a government that has not been elected, so that is hypothetical. The question was: what would the nature of those cuts be?

Mr Barr: Proposed cuts that have been publicly announced.

MADAM SPEAKER: That is not within your ministerial responsibility. I rule the question out of order.

Mr Corbell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, on your ruling. I would ask you to reconsider because it is quite clear that Ms Porter was asking about comments on the public record from the alternative government and what they intend to do should they be elected. The Treasurer has been asked what will be the impact of that on the ACT economy.

MADAM SPEAKER: That is not the question that Ms Porter asked.

Mr Corbell: It has been quantified by the alternative government as being 20,000 jobs.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Can people please be quiet so I can hear Mr Corbell?

Mr Corbell: Clearly, it is entirely within the ambit of the Treasurer responsible for the management of the ACT economy to indicate the impact of the loss of 20,000 jobs from the ACT economy. What part of the question is hypothetical when all of those facts are known and on the public record, Madam Speaker?

MADAM SPEAKER: Sit down.

Mr Coe: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: On my ruling? You want to contribute as well, Mr Coe?

Mr Coe: Yes, Madam Speaker. The supplementary asked by Ms Porter was about the proposed nature of the cuts. I believe the only person that can accurately answer that is the federal government. I do not see how the ACT government can actually control that.

MADAM SPEAKER: I have made my ruling. The ruling is such that, on this occasion, if Ms Porter can rephrase the question to make it in order, it is within the capacity of the Speaker to direct that a member may rephrase the question to make it in order. But it cannot be hypothetical and it cannot deal with the areas of responsibility of a commonwealth minister.

MS PORTER: Minister, what was the impact of the cuts in 1996 on the ACT economy?

MR BARR: I can advise that in 1996-97—

Mr Coe: On a point of order, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Can we stop the clock. Yes, Mr Coe.

Mr Coe: Madam Speaker, I ask how that supplementary question is directly relevant to the original question.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is directly relevant to the question or matters that arise in answering the question. Mr Barr has raised in the questioning issues about proposed cuts to the public service. It is in order.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can advise that the result of the impact on the ACT economy in 1996-97 was an increase in the ACT's unemployment rate by one percentage point, a \$25,000 drop in the average price of a Canberra home—and I would of course remind members that in 1996-97 that was a very significant proportion of the value of a home in this city—and an increase in personal bankruptcies in the territory by around 100 per year. The expectation prior to the 1996 election was that 2½ thousand jobs would be lost. That was the public statement of the incoming government. After winning office, more than 30,000 public servants lost their jobs. We do face, according to the shadow treasurer, who said it on the 7.30 program, a further 20,000 job cuts. He said that on 8 May 2012.

Mr Smyth: No, he didn't say that and you can't lie to the Assembly.

MR BARR: No, he did. He said on 8 May on the 7.30 program—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order! Can you stop the clock. Sit down, Mr Barr. Mr Smyth, can you withdraw that, please?

Mr Smyth: I withdraw, but you cannot mislead the Assembly. He needs to quote the whole quote, not interpret the quote.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth, you know as well as I do, or better than I do, that if you want to make that allegation you do it through a substantive motion.

MR BARR: Is he going to withdraw?

MADAM SPEAKER: Have you withdrawn?

Mr Smyth: I did; I withdrew it.

MR BARR: And then with a snide comment is he going to withdraw?

MADAM SPEAKER: No, could you just withdraw—

MR BARR: Do you withdraw without qualification?

Mr Smyth: I withdrew without qualification.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Just for the record, could you withdraw without qualification?

Mr Smyth: To keep the precious ones happy, I withdraw without qualification.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Smyth!

Members interjecting—

MR SMYTH: Without qualification I withdraw. Don't you understand? Goodness me, they are precious.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Berry, do you have a point of order?

Ms Berry: No. I was just going to ask a supplementary question. I was waiting for the apology.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think we are not finished this bit yet.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I must say that was like pulling teeth, wasn't it, Madam Speaker. I am glad you did not have to use your "mother's voice" on Mr Smyth on that occasion.

MADAM SPEAKER: I like to keep it in reserve.

MR BARR: You keep it in reserve. I am sure Mr Smyth can look forward to it being deployed on him, as it will be equally deployed from time to time. To be clear, the impact and the greatest threat that this economy and this community faces is having 20,000 jobs ripped out of our economy. It is so serious that our incumbent Liberal senator has warned us of this and said that only he can stand between us and that fate.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Smyth.

MR SMYTH: Minister, why has ACT Labor policy seen the private sector decline from 60 per cent of employment in 2001 to 49 per cent of employment in 2012?

MR BARR: Firstly, I do not accept Mr Smyth's figures. I understand that a more recent analysis shows that non-government employment in the territory is in fact over 50 per cent. Now, we can have an argument over definitions, but I would also point out that what has happened is that there has been growth in both private sector jobs and public sector jobs; it is just that the growth in public sector jobs has been faster in

recent times. So both sectors have grown. There are now more people in employment in the territory than ever before, so we continue to see employment growth, which is encouraging.

What certainly has been the case is that jobs that were outsourced from the public sector to the private sector under the Howard government have been brought back into the public sector, partially by the Howard government towards the end of their term and also under the Rudd and Gillard governments. What has led to significant growth in employment in the territory—and Mr Smyth would know this and I imagine would support it—is that there has been a significant increase in employment in the defence and security industries, for example, and that has largely been in the public sector.

So the key point here is that there has been growth in both private employment and public employment. The reason the ratio has changed is that public sector employment has been greater, and that has predominantly been driven in the commonwealth public sector although, of course, the ACT government is now employing more people in health and in education and in emergency services and in community services and in disability services. So we have, of course, increased employment in the territory. That has been important to provide high quality services to the people of Canberra.

If Mr Smyth objects to that increase in employment, he should say so. But he should also acknowledge that there has been growth in private sector employment, and I would think that as the shadow treasurer he should welcome that. I would hope he would and that, aside from making a cheap political point today, he would support employment growth.

Health—birthing centre

MR WALL: My question is to the Minister for Health and it is about staff recruitment. The Health Directorate has attributed the low occupancy rate of the birth centre at the Centenary hospital to a difficulty in recruiting and retaining midwives. Minister, when planning was conducted to build the Centenary hospital, what work was conducted to ensure that we would have adequate staff to maintain this facility?

MS GALLAGHER: I thank Mr Wall for the question. A lot of work goes into workforce planning right across the health system. There is a detailed workforce plan and data collected across all areas. The issue in the birth centre is that it is a particular type of midwife who works in those arrangements. It is not always attractive to all midwives. There is an international shortage of midwives. There is a national shortage of midwives. There are local pressures for midwives.

Midwives in the hospital often work in the hospital because they have certainty around their shifts. For the community midwives program, which is the program that makes you eligible for the birth centre or use of the birth centre, those midwives are on call 24/7 with their clients, and that does not suit all midwives. So we often have pressure in recruiting midwives to that program because of the nature of the work. Particularly for midwives with young children and families, it is a very difficult job to do.

One of the challenges of operating a maternity service like the one in the ACT is that you have to provide private midwives, public midwives, community midwives, high care through the foetal medical unit, the NICU, with all of the nursing staff there. We provide a range of options for women to meet all women's choices. But, at times, that will place workforce pressures, and the community midwives program is one of those areas.

In terms of recruitment of nurses and midwives, that is ongoing. It is constant. We are offering more opportunities for graduates. The new course out at the University of Canberra allows people to get a Bachelor of Midwifery. They do not have to do their registered nursing training. I think that will help in the future. But at the moment it is certainly an area of pressure, as it is for every health system across the country.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Minister, what planning has been conducted to ensure that the Canberra University public hospital has adequate staff to maintain this facility once it is opened?

MS GALLAGHER: Mr Wall might not know that a proportion of the beds that will be provided in the northside hospital are beds that are currently operating across Calvary and Canberra hospitals in the subacute settings. But the workforce planning that has been done in health also runs alongside the new services and the new beds that we are planning to open.

A detailed workforce plan—I am not sure if it was provided to the opposition—or a clinical services plan which covers off a lot of the planning going forward was released. That goes into some detail. But it is extensive in Health. You have to plan your workforce. You cannot open services if you do not have the workforce to staff them.

But at times that will still mean we have areas of pressure. We have it in medical specialities. We have it in allied health specialities. We have it in nursing. We have it right across the board down to ward staff—wardsmen. All those areas experience workforce pressures, as they do in every single health system across the country, regardless of which political party is in government.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Dr Bourke.

DR BOURKE: Minister, could you inform the Assembly what benefits will arise for my constituents in the electorate of Ginninderra from the opening of the new subacute hospital at the University of Canberra?

MS GALLAGHER: It will have a number of benefits. One is that it will be a big employment base in the electorate of Ginninderra. It will also have very strong ties with the University of Canberra, which is a big employer in this town, and will strengthen the university's ability to attract and retain really high quality staff in the areas of medical specialty that will be provided at the subacute hospital. So it certainly will have very significant support for employment in the electorate of Ginninderra.

But, more broadly across Canberra, having a unit that specialises in subacute care will significantly enhance the services that we can currently provide that are provided at a number of different locations across Canberra, whether it be out at Kambah, with the aged care and rehab centre there, at Canberra Hospital, at Calvary or indeed with some of the services that are offered in nursing homes. Again, if we can co-locate those and use the strength of the university, the capacity to provide students with those great clinical opportunities and provide high quality care to the people of Canberra, it is going to be a really good outcome for all of us.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, in what other areas of Health is the ACT having difficulties in retaining or recruiting staff?

MS GALLAGHER: From time to time there will be vacancies that exist in a whole range of different areas across the health profession. It is a massive employer in town, and I can say that from time to time we juggle recruitment difficulties in medical, nursing, allied health with specialist services like medical physicists. It is the nature of the business we operate.

As Canberra's health system grows—and this is one of the benefits of having a regional health service—we are having less trouble recruiting to highly specialised positions. Our separation rate is very good in terms of people leaving the Health Directorate, and I think that is really encouraging. It shows that the system is getting to a point where people, certainly high-level specialists, are wanting to come and work in Canberra and provide their skills here. We are retaining the staff that we are developing.

Look at the interns, for example. Look at the medical graduates that are coming out from the university. I think we are taking 99 of them this year, up from about 80 last year; that is, our own medical graduates being trained in Canberra, wanting to stay and work across the public health system. And that is a credit to the way the health system is managed. It is a credit to the universities for the partnership and it shows what a good employer the Health Directorate is.

Environment—Better Place

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Minister, in a press release dated 24 July 2009, you stated:

The Government is also striving to achieve zero net emissions in the ACT, and this announcement by *Better Place* will give Canberrans another way that they can help work towards this target ...

Minister, what was the cost to ACT taxpayers of the support given to Better Place?

MR CORBELL: The government had no contractual relationship with Better Place. The government had an agreement with Better Place to cooperate on technical and

regulatory issues relating to their proposed rollout of the electric vehicle network. This involved the normal day-to-day work of the relevant officers within the ACT government, such as, for example, the electrical safety and technical regulation area in the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate. There were no additional costs beyond the normal day-to-day operations of the government.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, how will Better Place's decision to close in Australia affect your stated goal of achieving zero net emissions in the ACT?

MR CORBELL: I thank Mrs Jones for the question. It will not impact on that goal at all directly. Obviously, it is disappointing that Better Place as a global company have chosen, at least at this point in time, to withdraw from the Australian market and their plans for Canberra. But they are only one of a number of private companies engaged in developing a business model around the supply, recharge and powering of electric vehicles.

We know that a number of vehicle manufacturers globally are continuing with their plans to develop and make ready for retail consumption electric vehicles, and we look forward to those continuing efforts. But the government's focus in terms of achieving its greenhouse gas reduction strategy, as outlined in action plan 2, when it comes to transport fuels is predicated on growth in the use of public transit—that is, public transport services as well as walking and cycling—and it is not directly predicated on an uptake in the private vehicle fleet of electric vehicles, although that will have benefit if it occurs.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary question, Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: Minister, what is the benefit of setting emissions reduction targets?

MR CORBELL: I thank Ms Porter for the question. Cities have a central role to play in both setting and implementing emissions reduction targets. The government on this side do not take the view that climate change science is some sort of exaggeration or is simply a statistical game where you can make statistics say whatever you want them to say. We accept the view of a global panel of scientists assembled from around the world for over a decade now that asserts the clear, verifiable and rigorously tested scientific evidence that climate change is occurring and that climate change does have a direct impact on global temperatures and therefore on the liveability of our world into the future.

It is the clear and overwhelming responsibility of all citizens to respond to this very real and present danger that exists in relation to our standard of living, to global wellbeing and to the ability for us to leave a liveable environment for our children and their children.

When it comes to the role of cities like Canberra, cities like Canberra have a very real and important role to play. Cities are the key generators of emissions. Whether it is in terms of transport fuels, electricity use or other energy use, we are the places that

consume the energy. Globally, cities account for over 50 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, and it is incumbent on us to have a strategy and a plan to deliver emissions reductions.

I was in Woolworths the other day and I saw that—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! Supplementary question, Mr Coe.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, members! Mr Coe has the floor.

Members interjecting—

MR COE: As a supplementary, how many regular users of Better Place are there and how many registered electric vehicles are there in the ACT?

MR CORBELL: In relation to registered uses of Better Place, the government is not in a position to provide that data. That is a private contractual arrangement with Better Place and its customers. In relation to the issue of the number of registered electric vehicles in the ACT, I am sure the number is small but I am happy to take the exact number on notice.

Schools—swimming

MS BERRY: My question is to the minister for education. Can the minister outline changes to the ACT government's swimming policy?

MS BURCH: I thank the member for the question. I was pleased to release the swimming pool and water park policy at a school swimming carnival at Manuka Pool last week. This new policy has been endorsed by the Royal Life Saving Society. Indeed, I am pleased to have received a letter from the President of the Royal Life Saving Society ACT, the Chief Justice of the ACT Supreme Court, Terence Higgins, which says:

The collaboration between the Directorate and the Society on this policy has resulted in procedures we believe will encourage maximum participation and will give schools clear guidance to ensure the safety of all students. The Society is pleased to endorse the policy and to co-badge the procedures as a collaborative initiative.

The policy has been strengthened to reflect the government's intent to encourage maximum student participation in aquatic activities. The policy reinstates the option of unstructured aquatic activities at swimming pool or water park aquatic events. The review of the policy was conducted late last year following a near drowning incident at a swimming pool event. When an interim policy was released last year it was clear that further work was needed. I made it clear that this work was to be completed in time for the new school year and that it must have Royal Life Saving Society endorsement.

The new policy maintains that all ACT aquatic venues have a five-star accreditation rating from the Royal Life Saving Society. Under the new policy the proficiency test is only required for students who are participating in unstructured activities in a water depth at or above their waist. The proficiency test is not required when students are participating in structured activities.

The policy sets out a minimum supervision ratio for any aquatic activity of one teacher to 20 students. The ratios for individual activities can be determined in consultation with venue operators. This allows schools the flexibility to decide the best supervision ratios to ensure student participation in a safe environment. When using interstate swimming pools or water parks, the schools must provide evidence from the venue of compliance with the Royal Life Saving Society Australia guidelines for pool safety.

Madam Speaker, it is important that our children can enjoy school swimming events in a safe environment, and I am pleased that our policy has got the balance right. Sean Hodges from the Royal Life Saving Society said on WIN news last week:

... the policy that we have is really leading the way across Australia.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: How will this policy help to build on the Australian tradition of fun and safety in water sport for all of our children?

MS BURCH: I thank the member for her question. The ACT government understands the value of providing opportunities for young people not only to be physically active but also to learn fundamental skills such as water safety. These are vital parts of a child's education. The ACT government recognises the importance of providing students with opportunities to participate in school-based aquatic activities such as swimming carnivals. These events play an important role in developing a student's confidence around water, building capacity to improve health and fitness and contributing to a positive school culture.

The swimming pool and water park policy aims to encourage participation of all students in a safe and supportive environment. The contribution of the Royal Life Saving Society has ensured that the policy protects all students in and around water by assisting teachers to adopt best practice in organisation and supervision. The policy encourages pool operators to support students and schools in providing a safe environment.

The ACT government has also encouraged school swimming and water safety education through a budget initiative of \$140,000 per annum in this year and in the previous two financial years. The Royal Life Saving Society has also provided \$60,000 per annum to assist in the provision of school and water safety programs. In 2012, 4,836 students from 35 public schools participated in vital swimming and water safety lessons. This is a 35 per cent increase in participation from 2011. I look forward to seeing those numbers grow in future years.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary question, Mr Gentleman.

MR GENTLEMAN: Minister, what will the students learn through having opportunities to engage in swimming, especially structured activities like races?

MS BURCH: I thank the member for his interest. Beyond the obvious application around water safety, there are some more subtle but still important skills that are learnt at this early age when children take part in structured school swimming activities such as those covered by this policy—skills, for example, around physical and psychological endurance, which are skills that hold children in good stead through their teenage years and, indeed, into adulthood.

In and out of the pool an important life lesson is taking up the challenge, staying on course and seeing things through. School swimming carnivals teach a child that you cannot get halfway through a race, realise you cannot win and jump out of the pool to find another event that might be easier to win. Children learn at these swimming carnivals to be good sports and to race fairly and with respect for their opponents. They learn that just because you cannot win a race, it is not okay to switch lanes, to drag down your opponent and to sprint to the finish line, because that sort of conduct is not usually condoned in the real world, and it certainly is not tolerated at swimming carnivals.

The broader lessons teach us all that a commitment that is made should be followed through and not dumped at a whim, particularly like Mr Seselja has dumped the good folk of Tuggeranong. Swimming and water safety are, indeed, important life skills that provide invaluable lessons throughout life. I look forward to all ACT schools participating in swimming activities, staying true to the course and not leaving behind those that have faith in them.

Ms Gallagher: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Health—aged care

MS GALLAGHER: Yesterday in question time Mr Hanson asked me a question relating to comments I had made on ABC radio. I went back to check the transcript of what I had said and compare it to the report that I did not have before me, but I do now. As expected, Mr Hanson had selectively quoted from the transcript. I said, “I think if you look at the results, they are pleasing. If you look at cancer, if you look at aged care and rehab in time for assessments, you will see that the results there are excellent and improving.”

What Mr Hanson then did was to link it to another figure from a previous quarterly report, not comparing the numbers that I was comparing when I was making those comments on ABC radio. So I did have to go back and find where he had found 1.7 days from. For the information of members, I am very confident that I was not misleading anyone in making those comments. If you look at cancer, time for assessment in cancer had significantly improved over that year-to-date September quarter from 72 per cent to 99 per cent.

In aged care and rehab, the difference was 0.1 of a per cent which relates to two hours. There had been a two-hour change in that. From the previous year, it had improved from 2.2 days. I am very confident that the comments I have made, when seen in the context that I made them and compared to the report I was quoting from—a report that Mr Hanson compared it to—were accurate.

Bushfires—management

MR CORBELL: In question time today Mr Smyth asked me a follow-up question in relation to debriefs for fires during the January period. I am advised by the Emergency Services Agency Commissioner that the formal debriefs will occur at the end of the bushfire danger period—that is, after the end of March. At that time the Rural Fire Service will conduct a series of formal debriefs of brigades which will then be followed by an ESA debrief of all agencies.

I am also advised that the ESA Commissioner has met with RFS brigade captains and reports from those present at his meeting were generally positive of bushfire operations to date, in both the ACT and with respect to appointments to New South Wales. I am further advised that feedback to brigades has been very positive from community members in the district of Bungendore, and surrounding Bungendore, due to the efforts of RFS brigades during their deployments direct to the Sand Hill fire at Bungendore earlier in January. My thanks go to all of those brigades for their deployment, particularly to Bungendore, to the serious fire they encountered there.

Aboriginal reconciliation—national apology to stolen generation

Statement by minister

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing), by leave: Today marks the fifth anniversary of the Prime Minister's apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were so grievously hurt by the Australian government's past policies and practices for forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families, families that can be recognised as the stolen generation.

The apology was a deeply moving affair and the apology by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd became a defining moment not just for the Australian government in accepting responsibility for the destructive policies of the past but for our nation in openly acknowledging our history and the grief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had suffered.

I would also like to acknowledge that the ACT was one of the first states and territories to offer our own unique apology under then Chief Minister Kate Carnell in 1997. This was a proud moment for the Assembly, a time when our Assembly had demonstrated leadership to others in this country. The Prime Minister's speech on 13 February 2008 was a clear call for genuine reconciliation to properly begin to provide a real basis for the deep hurts to begin healing. It was a heartfelt and sincere speech, and one that resonated nationally and even globally.

Memorable and telling was the emotion of Aboriginal families who heard in the words an unreserved “we are sorry”. From the public gallery at Parliament House to the live coverage on the streets of Melbourne and Sydney, and through the living rooms of every Australian, we all felt the power of that moment.

As Dr Tom Calma, a recent Canberran of the Year award recipient, said at the time:

Through one direct act, the parliament has acknowledged the existence and the impacts of past policies and practices of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families, and by so doing has paid respect to the Stolen Generations for their suffering and their loss, and for their resilience, and ultimately for their dignity.

It was only last week that the current Prime Minister made another important speech about Australia’s work towards closing the gaps and rectifying the disadvantage facing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders that still exists, and may unfortunately exist for some time.

The *Closing the gap* report 2013 highlights the genuine desire to work for, and with, Aboriginal people and organisations to improve areas of strategic priority. In the ACT this is focused on indicators of early childhood, education, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities, and governance and leadership.

The report also acts as a reflection on Australian society by presenting some positive movement, some areas for improvement, and some areas where the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are still shameful, all of which are underpinned by hope, goodwill and aspirational targets for a more equitable future. This is also reflected in the ACT’s 2012 reporting on the measures, with many positive and commendable programs and partnerships indicating a genuine intention to work towards a fairer and more just society.

However, while we can acknowledge the good and be proud of our territory’s progress compared to other jurisdictions, this cannot be used as an argument to rest, or to take the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or their needs for granted. We must pause in this place sometimes and be absolutely clear that while we are talking about indicators, frameworks and statistics, we are talking about helping people—families and individuals; Australians—whose very life expectancies are still less than those of other Australians, real people with unique circumstances and personal stories.

We are lucky in the ACT to have such strong advocates and passionate organisations working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our shared community. In particular, I have been impressed in the short time I have been a minister by the hard work and dedication of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, who have recently handed over their latest report to government. I would like to thank them for their work on this report and acknowledge that the ACT government has further work to do on a local level to maintain and further strengthen this and other important relationships.

We are now five years on from the apology, one of the most important moments in Australia's movement towards reconciliation. Today there will be a celebration of this anniversary on the lawns of Parliament House. More than just a celebration, however, there will be a sense of reflection and consideration on how far we have come and recognition of the work we need to do together in government and in our own lives to ensure that our journey continues.

I am personally looking forward to attending this evening's concert and hearing a legend of the Australian music scene, Archie Roach, perform. I am also looking forward to seeing other great acts like Dan Sultan playing here in Canberra during the centenary year, when the people can truly look to Canberra and Parliament House and say, "There is an example of when politicians came together to get something right."

I would like to encourage other members in the chamber, and in fact all Canberrans, to head up to Parliament House this evening for the concert, to have a great night, to celebrate, and also to show their support for the intent of the apology. As the organiser of the event has said, these celebrations will involve people from across Australia sharing the progress of their own healing journeys, and I wholeheartedly support that.

MS GALLAGHER (Molonglo—Chief Minister, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Health and Minister for Higher Education), by leave: I also rise to acknowledge the fifth anniversary today of one of the most significant addresses in our nation's social and political history delivered in federal parliament by the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. On this day five years ago, the national apology to the stolen generations went beyond symbolism. It pledged a new beginning in Indigenous policy. The closing the gap policy commitment immediately followed the apology.

The then Prime Minister said in his now famous speech for the stolen generations:

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving with confidence to the future.

I recall that five years ago Aboriginal leaders who gathered here in our city to listen to the Prime Minister apologise on behalf of every Australian reacted with joy and with relief at the very long-overdue event. I think the event had special significance for Aboriginal women and allowed many of them to begin their healing process.

It was a genuine acknowledgement of the pain and the grief suffered by many separated, not only from their families, but so often from their culture and their language. The apology did more than confront the wrongs of the past. It inspired optimism for a better future.

It was effective because it joined the then Prime Minister's personal commitment with a political and institutional commitment to future action. The former Prime Minister pledged to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage with a suite of measures to alleviate disadvantage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. His speech bequeathed a bipartisan policy commitment driven in partnership with the states and territories and the federal government to focus on improvements in education, in health and in employment. Today progress is monitored and measured.

Following the apology, the ACT also made changes to the way we approached our relationship with members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The ACT government initiated and enacted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act 2008 which gave every eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person living in the ACT democratically elected representation and a voice that would be heard by those responsible for designing programs and services that have direct impact on their life outcomes.

The 2013 *Closing the gap* report released last week shows that progress is mixed but improvements are being made. Child mortality has declined. Positive results are being achieved in employment, education and training. Of course, there are more challenging issues such as violence, alcohol and drug abuse, welfare dependency and reducing the rates of imprisonment, which need to be tackled in partnership with the private and the non-government sectors.

I think in the ACT, when I look at some of the major issues that I would like to continue to work on here for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, they relate to education, smoking cessation and to the justice system and particularly to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

I finish up with just a little reflection on why the apology is so important and will continue to be so important. The apology is played in the National Museum in a room that is designated for the continual playing of the apology. I visited there a few weeks ago with my small children. In fact, one of them was just born when the apology was given. They sat and watched the apology. I think for me that brought home just why it was so important to have it done. You have the next generation of Australians at a very early age understanding and seeing that their leaders have apologised for policies and decisions that have had such serious detrimental impact on our first peoples.

I think that that is probably the lasting legacy of that apology—not only to help heal the first peoples but also to teach the new generations, the younger generations, why what happened to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was so wrong.

MR HANSON (Molonglo—Leader of the Opposition), by leave: I will be brief because Mr Wall will make further remarks on behalf of the opposition in his role as the shadow minister, but it is important that I, as opposition leader, note the fifth anniversary of the apology.

It certainly was an important day and on behalf of the opposition and the Canberra Liberal Party, I would like to express my acknowledgement of that. We can be very proud here in the ACT that it was this Assembly that actually instigated the first apology to Indigenous people. I think that is something that we can reflect on and be proud of here.

As a number of people have alluded to, the apology is only part of the problem, part of the issue, part of the concern that we have that needs to be addressed in Indigenous issues and we still have a long way to go, both in reconciliation and in closing the gap on issues such as health, education and criminal justice, as others spoke about.

It certainly is an area that I, as the previous shadow for Indigenous affairs, maintain very positive relations on with the government, particularly with Jon Stanhope when we were dealing with Indigenous matters. It is certainly an important issue that I would like the opposition, wherever possible, to maintain a bipartisan approach on.

There are some issues where we will play politics, but this is one where we certainly will not. I think it behoves all of us in here to put maximum effort towards not only reconciliation but also doing everything we can to close that gap in disadvantage.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra), by leave: In 2008 the new federal Labor government under Kevin Rudd delivered the long-awaited apology to the stolen generations for the forced removal of Indigenous children. Today marks the fifth anniversary. Supporting an apology has been part of the Labor Party's platform for many years and was one of the first items of business for a new Labor federal government. Saying "sorry" to the stolen generations carried enormous weight, even more so because it had been denied for so long.

The ACT Legislative Assembly reached out to the stolen generations with an apology in 1997 and this preceded the commonwealth apology by 11 years. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's national apology in 2008 brought the nation together in recognising the hurt and damage done by past practices that created the stolen generations. It was a profound, cathartic moment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and for the nation—a national apology which was long overdue. A barrier in Australia to facing up to our history had been built. We needed to tell the truth and create a better Australian story.

The apology was about recognising our past, the pain and grief inflicted on the Indigenous families who suffered under past policies and continue to be damaged by that legacy. You could see on the day of the apology its importance for the whole community. It meant the release of so much pent-up hurt. It was the rain after a long drought.

The apology recognised the pain that had continued from shattered families. Children and parents had grown old without knowing what had happened to each other, not knowing if they would ever meet up again. It was a pain that extended through the following generations growing up without their family and cultural support. The language and culture of children taken away was systematically attacked, as it was on the missions and reserves where many Aboriginal people were forced to go to or sought refuge from those taking their land.

The apology was an important step that allowed us to talk more freely about what happened and where we go to from now. It cleared the way for many of the healing programs assisting individuals and communities to understand the past and to address the issues holding them back today. Building on that apology, the federal government established the independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to support community programs and fund research on healing.

The apology was a new beginning. It is important that the work of healing and reconciliation continues and that programs are in place to address the huge needs in the Indigenous community so everyone can reach their full potential. The apology in 2008 to the stolen generations sits with some of the great milestones in Australia that mark the transformation of the relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. These include the 1967 referendum, the 1992 Mabo decision and the Reconciliation Day bridge walk in 2000.

Today, to mark this anniversary, the House of Representatives has passed an Act of Recognition. It is a first step towards the ultimate and significant goal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' place as the first owners of this land being enshrined in our constitution by referendum. The significance of the 2008 apology in addressing the damage done in the past has been reflected in the calls for apologies from other groups wronged by government.

The Assembly's apology to the women who suffered the trauma of having a child taken at birth for forced adoption last August was one such example. Indeed, that apology resonated in the Indigenous community where forced adoptions contributed to the stolen generations of Indigenous children. The national apology dealt with intensely personal, tragic circumstances and, however late it was, it brought solace to many.

MR WALL (Brindabella), by leave: I too would like to acknowledge today the fifth anniversary of the apology to the stolen generations. The apology made on 13 February 2008 was a watershed moment in the history of our nation, an important step on the road to healing and reconciliation. The apology made by Mr Rudd acknowledged and recognised the grief, pain, sense of loss and suffering by thousands of our nation's first people. A whole generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were forcibly removed from their families and communities by government and other authorities and placed into the care of institutions or foster families. This took place for no other reason than race. Worse still, this was done under so-called child protection laws set down by governments of the day.

It is important on this day that we reflect on how far government and social policy have come since this era. It is also important to note here today that the word "sorry" has a special and very significant meaning for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It expresses a deep acknowledgement of loss and suffering, rather than a responsibility; a difference that many have struggled to come to terms with.

I too would like to acknowledge the members of the Third Assembly and then Liberal Chief Minister Kate Carnell who, on 17 June 1997, historically and unanimously passed a motion in this place which sought to apologise to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT. The motion read in part:

- (1) apologises to the Ngun(n)awal people and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT for the hurt and distress inflicted upon any people as a result of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families;

- (2) assures the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this Territory that the Assembly regards the past practices of forced separation as abhorrent and expresses our sincere determination that they will not happen in the ACT ...

Whether we see today, the fifth anniversary of Mr Rudd's apology to the stolen generation, as a day of celebration or a day of recognition, it is nonetheless a milestone on the road to proper reconciliation. Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton suggests that a formal apology would achieve two things. Firstly, it would aid in the restoration of a sense of dignity and legitimacy to those who had suffered and, secondly, it would acknowledge the serious harm done by previous governments to a class of people on the grounds of their race.

There is still much work to be done. I note with alarm the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community are over-represented in too many areas and make up the negative statistics far too often. There are too many early deaths, too many incarcerations, too many preventable illnesses and too much unemployment amongst our Indigenous population.

We must all work together to build on the work that has been done and must not rest on our laurels. I believe that all sides of politics need to come together to properly address this issue definitively. We owe it to the community to work collaboratively on these issues. I would like to think that members of the Tenth Assembly, on the 15th anniversary of this apology, will be able to stand in this place and have a very different speech to give, a speech full of success and less negative statistics and a story that is one of true reconciliation.

Major events at Manuka Oval

Debate resumed.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (4:10): Before lunch we heard some amazing statements. I think the most amazing statement was that there are over 7,500 legal car parks within one kilometre of Manuka Oval. I would challenge anybody in this place to go out on a Tuesday or a Wednesday afternoon when we have had some big events recently and find one of those car parks empty. Yes, there are car parks there. But what are we saying? What are the Labor Party and the Greens saying? Are they saying that on special events days public servants should not go to work so that their car park is free for the cricket crowd? Are they saying that people should not go shopping at Manuka or the surrounding shops so that those car parks can be kept free for the cricket crowd? That is cuckoo land stuff. There probably are 7,500 legal car parks within a kilometre of Manuka Oval and I reckon for most of the time during the week they are full.

That is the whole point. That was the whole point Mr Hanson and I made when we were on the estimates committee two years ago. The committee recommended that the ACT government develop a comprehensive transport plan to ensure that the additional seating capacity within the Manuka Oval can be accommodated. That is what the committee said. What Mr Hanson and I wanted, of course, which the Greens and the

Labor Party did not agree to, was that the transport plan should incorporate parking as well as public transport issues. But, no, heaven forbid. You cannot mention parking—parking, the great evil; parking, the destroyer of our city! How dare you suggest that for a location where we will have over the years to come many big events you should have a parking plan? God forbid!

It is quite amazing. The minister or somebody picked up their little piece of A4 paper with their parking plan on it. Yes, it showed the streets around the oval and it showed locations, but it did not tell you where the capacity was. It did not tell you what they had improved to make it work better. What it did not do was actually increase the amount of parking that there was. Of course there cannot be a park for everybody that goes to a game. That would be ludicrous. But what Mr Hanson and I were saying a couple of years ago—and I think it is what the experience has shown—is that it is reasonable to include parking when you are doing a major plan for an area. If you do not, you are denying the ability to use most effectively and most efficiently the land that would surround such an area.

There is much being said in this motion. In the actual estimates back in 2011 there was a lovely exchange between Mr Hanson and Mr Barr about the elements of parking. Right at the end I think are the important questions when Mr Hanson goes, “When people park at Manuka they often park in the street or they park on some school ovals.” “There are designated major event parking areas for Manuka,” says Mr Barr. Mr Hanson says, “That is right.” Mr Barr says, “Yes.” The chair goes, “Will they be upgraded?” Mr Barr says, “No.” Pure and simple: we are going to increase the capacity of Manuka and we are not going to upgrade the parking. It does not sound like a sensible plan to me.

No-one is saying, “Go out and build a high rise.” No-one is saying, “Clear fell a couple of parks or something and just cover them with bitumen.” We are simply saying that we know that when big events occur in places around Australia and around the world they often have mass transit systems upon which to rely. They have trains that take you to the stadium and they have trams. If anybody has ever been to the G in Melbourne you know how close you can get. But there is also parking at the G in Melbourne. If you go to the cricket ground in Sydney there is also parking. If you go to any major oval and complex there is also parking. If you go out to the Olympic Stadium in Sydney there is also parking.

It is sad that we just get so ideologically blinkered to the possibility that somebody might like to go in their car somewhere with their family. Cars can be an effective form of transport too. If you take all your mates in the one car it can be effective. If you take the whole family in the one car, it can be effective. But we have this blanket “no” from the government. In light of what happened it is very important, given this motion today, that this amendment goes down because, as always, government amendments gut motions and turn them into a little bit of self-congratulatory activity, a bit of a pat on the back there for the minister and his team.

I was at the cricket last week and it was great—absolutely fantastic. It is fantastic because of things like the Bradman stand built by previous Liberal governments. It is fantastic because of the lights. The lights are great. It would be good to relay

something from the arboretum opening the other night when David Marshall, the MC, got up and Mr Barr was sitting at the table just there in front of Mr Marshall. As you would all know, Dave Marshall is a bit funny and in his introduction he said, “Andrew Barr told me that from here up at the hill at the arboretum you can see the lights of Manuka.” He then went on to say that, of course, Craig Thomson said you could see the lights of Fyshwick. That brought a bit of a chuckle from those in the crowd.

Those developments will go on and hopefully we will see more and more developments go on. It is about making sure that we have got the infrastructure. Governments of both inclinations have been involved in the development of these facilities. It is about getting it right and it is about getting it complete. Perhaps I will put a question on notice about the occupancy rate of the 7,500 legal car parks within one kilometre of Manuka Oval at 2 pm on a Wednesday afternoon because I reckon they would be pretty full. To say they are there—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR SMYTH: The minister shakes his head. No, they are not? The minister or maybe one of the others said, “Go and park at the Manuka Pool.” I do not know if you have been down to the Manuka Pool but most of the time it is full. There is not very much parking there because, oddly enough, it is right at the back of Manuka Oval. It is a bit daft to say, “Go park at the Manuka Pool.” You have got to go to a place where there is adequate parking. I think it is unfortunate, in their urge to only compliment themselves, that they do not look at the reality of what goes on at Manuka. Manuka would probably be one of the most difficult places in Canberra to park, certainly on a weekday. Even on the weekends Manuka can be incredibly busy, whether it be people going to the theatre, to church—there are various churches in the local area—or whether they are out restauranting at night or shopping during the day. It would be interesting to see some of those occupancy rates there as well. One of the things that the traders often complain about at Manuka is the lack of parking.

While we all have a desire to see more people use public transport, the reality is it does not always meet your needs. Take, for instance, the international last week. It started at, what, 2.20 in the afternoon? What if you had been to work? Perhaps you worked in Civic or Belconnen. What if you lived in Tuggeranong and you worked in Belconnen? You drove the car and you parked. You did the right thing. You got a bus to Manuka and you got a bus from Manuka back to Belconnen. You then got in your car to go back to Tuggeranong. It has got to be sensible. What I am hearing now is not sensible; it is just “no”. We heard it in estimates. We saw it in the estimates report where we tried to negotiate a sensible outcome. We have a Greens-Labor alliance, the most extreme alliance in the country, who simply say no. They say no to everything that does not comply with what they think is right.

What Mr Doszpot is doing here—and he is to be congratulated—is calling on the government to develop a parking management plan for the Manuka precinct for future games that takes into consideration the need for short-term temporary parking for a large number of cars at major events, recognising that not everyone can or wants to avail themselves of public transport. I think that is reasonable. It is not just the large-scale events at the oval. The Manuka-Kingston area is very busy. Many people

socialise there. They meet there after work. If you talk to the traders at Manuka about the impact, for instance, of a large exhibition at the National Gallery, they will often tell you that you can see the impact of these exhibitions on Manuka because there is already limited parking there. Many people tell me they lose business because people cannot get a park and they go elsewhere.

People say, "Canberra lacks soul." Manuka-Kingston is one of those lovely areas that have got character. It was built very early in the development of the ACT. We need to protect that. No-one is saying open slather on the car. We are saying: let us have a reasonable approach and ensure that we do not impede or hinder the growth of functions and events at Manuka and in the parliamentary triangle. Let us not hinder or impede the growth of the reputation of Canberra as a great place to visit, where the things that we value, the amenity and the ability to move quickly, which clearly major cities like Sydney and Melbourne have often lost, are not lost. Let us say to people that if they come to Canberra they can have an enjoyable experience, instead of leaving town with a little brown envelope tucked in their top pocket. It colours everyone's experience, wherever they go, if they pick up a parking ticket. Let us make it easy. Let us make it hospitable. Let us continue to improve the public transport system, but at the same time let us recognise that people do use their cars and they have a right to do so.

MR BARR (Molonglo—Deputy Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Tourism and Events and Minister for Community Services) (4.20): I thank members for their contributions, and certainly those who have made positive comments in relation to the events themselves. I would like to take this opportunity to put on the record my thanks to the Economic Development Directorate, ActewAGL, Cricket ACT and, most particularly, Cricket Australia for their very strong support for the series of events in Canberra.

It is terrific to be able to have the Australian cricket team play in our city. As I said in my speech during the dinner break, it has been 100 years in the making. There is no doubt that the event itself was the best atmosphere of any of the one-day internationals across the summer, and that feedback was certainly almost universal across those who attended the match. From an administrator's perspective, Cricket Australia, Cricket ACT and others welcomed that fantastic atmosphere at Manuka and the very strong support the people of Canberra showed, firstly, to the Prime Minister's XI team and then also to our national team.

Now, of course, in staging events of this magnitude there will always be challenges and lessons that can be learned. I think from the perspective of the caterers, for example, they were somewhat surprised by what I understand was an all-time beer-drinking record for an event at Manuka Oval. I am advised that the previous record was 110 kegs for a cricket match. That was beaten with 140 kegs at the Prime Minister's XI match and then absolutely smashed, hit over the fence, by 210 kegs consumed by the crowd at the one-day international.

I understand there were some questions raised about the 4, 2, 1 drinks policy that was in place in that up until, I understand, 6 pm an individual was allowed to purchase four beers; between 6 and 9 pm that was reduced to two and then after 9 pm it was

one beer per customer. That, I understand, is in place as a responsible service of alcohol policy and is pretty consistent for Cricket Australia events across the country. Undoubtedly, in the evening session that led to some people having to return to the beer queue more often than they would otherwise had they purchased four beers at one time, but I think any reasonable assessment of a responsible service of alcohol policy would endorse the 4, 2, 1 approach, particularly as you get into the ninth and 10th hours of a day at the cricket. I think that is a reasonable approach.

In relation to the parking issues, I am pleased that 99.8 per cent of those who attended the event were able to do so without incurring any traffic infringement. It is disappointing that a relatively small proportion of the crowd ignored all of the warnings that parking inspectors would certainly enforce illegal and dangerous parking. They did so, and that is entirely appropriate.

I think as we evaluate these particular events and look at the future centenary events this year at Manuka, noting the times that they will occur, the particular clash with the daytime work force will not be the case for AFL matches as they are either on a Friday evening or on a weekend. But I advise that in recent times there has been a significant increase in capacity for parking around Manuka, and I will list the following additional car parks that have become available in recent times: the East Hotel, which is where I parked. It cost me \$15, but I had a secure, undercover car park within 200 metres of the ground. When I arrived at the match—about an hour before—there were ample parks available in that car park. When I returned to collect my car at the end of the match, there were still lots of empty car parks. I do not know obviously in the intervening hours whether all of them were full, but, certainly at the time I arrived there were plenty at the East Hotel, which is a new hotel very close to Manuka Oval opposite the Kingston Hotel.

There is also additional car parking at the Burberry and Realm hotels, where I parked for the other match. I parked at the East for one and at the Burberry-Realm undercover car parks for the other, again, within close walking distance. I think the other one cost me \$8. So, yes, I paid for parking, but it, of course, provided a secure car park. Again, the advice from the operators there was that there were still surplus car parks at those locations.

Of course, we opened up both Kingston Foreshore and through an arrangement—and I thank them for this—there were parking opportunities at the Fyshwick markets and a short shuttle ride that I am advised would be between about two and a half and five minutes to drop you directly at the door of the ground. So, in the circumstance that Mr Smyth described in his commentary, if you had perhaps driven to work, you could have driven your car to Kingston Foreshore or the Fyshwick markets, caught a shuttle bus and then been returned to that location and continued your journey south if you worked in Belconnen and wanted to go to the game and then go home to Tuggeranong. That option would have been available for you.

Also, we made the parking at Kingston shops, which I understand is about 850 metres from the ground—that large surface car parking there—free for the afternoon for the matches as part of the special event parking that was widely publicised prior to the match.

The Telopea Park school grounds were also opened up, and Rotary did an excellent job in running that. I think you had to pay \$5 for that, but that gave you a car park about 200 metres from the front entrance of the ground. By experience in walking past that about a half hour before the start of one of the matches, there were still parks available there.

Of course, Manuka Plaza and the Manuka multi-level car parks were also available. I acknowledge there would have been some shoppers utilising them, but the advice from those who did a survey during the match was that there were still many, many, many free parks available at Manuka Plaza, the Manuka multi-storey and at Kingston.

Of course, we had in place free public transport, so anyone who wanted to go to the game from the city could catch dedicated shuttle buses from the CBD where, of course, there are 27,000 car parks available, and you would have been returned to, again, a very short walking distance from your car after the match if you chose to park in the city. Similar arrangements were in place in Woden.

I think it is important to recognise that all other major event venues in this country put in place a variety of measures to ensure that patrons are able to get to and from major events, and I think the best case study of this is the stadium formerly known as Lang Park in Brisbane, which used to have an arrangement where about 80 per cent of the crowd got there by car and 20 per cent utilised public transport. That would be about the ratio you see in Canberra at the moment. Well, as a result of some heavy promotion of public transport and some changes to the parking arrangements, that ratio has reversed and it is now only about 20 per cent who attend matches at what is now Suncorp Stadium who do so by private vehicle and 80 per cent come on public transport.

There is a combination of things that have worked there—park and ride being a very important part of it but also the free public transport to all ticket holders for the event. We are encouraging the hirers of Manuka Oval—be that cricket, AFL or any other organisation—to incorporate free public transport as part of their ticketing arrangements. Over time with a process of education advising people about all of those park-and-ride opportunities, where legal parking is available around the ground as well as promotion of public transport, we will see a culture change in Canberra towards accessing events at Manuka via those alternative means. Because, as Mr Smyth has acknowledged, it is not practical to provide a personal car park for every patron attending those events.

I note that in terms of future car parking provision within the broad precinct that there is a stated intent for a multi-level car park to be part of the Kingston Foreshore redevelopment, and the government will be pursuing that. That will provide more car parking within a short walking distance of Manuka. In fact, part of the investment in Manuka Oval and perhaps changing where the entrances are will encapsulate the possibility of parking at that structure in Kingston Foreshore and then walking up through Telopea Park to the event. We would hope, particularly in football season, to create the sort of approach to Manuka that you see walking up to a game at the MCG

or to the Docklands stadium, where there is entertainment along the way, where the programs and various supporters clubs for the teams gather and create a carnival atmosphere as you make your way towards the ground. That is what we are aiming for at Manuka.

I think the amendments that are put forward are fair, reasonable and reflect the important outcomes we are hoping to achieve. I urge members to support them.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.30): I, like 11,574 others, attended the one-day international match last week at Manuka and, I must say, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Manuka is the perfect venue for such matches, set in the leafy surrounds of Canberra's inner south within a stone's throw of all the allures of Manuka. Firstly, it is important that I, too, acknowledge the contribution made by Cricket ACT's Mark Vergano, in particular, to secure the event in Canberra. I heard some say recently that it was a thrill to watch the coverage on television and hear commentators talk about our lovely city in such a glowing fashion.

It was a beautiful day in Canberra on 6 February, and with tickets in hand for the one-day international match I set out for an enjoyable afternoon at the cricket. I am quite sure that my experience of the event will be much different to the experiences had by the minister. In fact, I am sure that my experience was more likely shared by the majority of goers to the cricket on that day. I did not have any special parking permits, I did not have any special seating or corporate box or favourable treatment at all. It is important to point out today that my experience would have been very much the same as most of the attendees at the cricket that day.

Had I been coming to the cricket that day from my home in Macarthur, being familiar with Manuka's parking limitations, I would have sought to catch the bus. However, this journey would have taken me well over two hours using the normal bus schedule. Given this tedious journey, it is reasonable to assume that most Canberrans living in Tuggeranong or Gungahlin, or any of our forgotten outer suburbs of Canberra, would be reliant on using their cars to get to Manuka.

Ms Burch: The ones that even your party have forgotten now. Walked away, left them high and dry.

Mr Seselja: I reckon Andrew will get more votes in Brindy next time than you.

MR WALL: I look forward to it.

I was, in fact, in my office at the Assembly that morning so, still armed with the knowledge that Manuka has some limitations in its parking, I thought I would catch one of the buses that have been so widely mentioned during this debate. The only problem was that they stopped operating from Civic at 2 pm, 20 minutes before the match began. I know the cricket started at 2.20. The simple consideration of having a bus service operating through the afternoon may have helped to alleviate the traffic and parking burden just a little. This would have allowed options for people intending to attend the match after work or into the evening to use the service. Again, I am sure I am not alone in this thinking.

My story illustrates that there were simply not the options available that there are in other Australian cities where international and major sporting events are held. The sheer lack of options available for those attending the cricket that day should have been a foremost thought for the government and other options should have been considered. International cricket and other major sporting events of this calibre bring many things to our great city, not least the extra tourism. Many of the out-of-town visitors who attended last week's event would not have been familiar with the lack of options for getting to the ground or parking around that facility. They may have naturally assumed that there were more frequent transport options, as there are in other cities.

It is important that the government addresses the issues of parking, transport and other matters of urgency. We cannot realistically expect to continue to attract events of this calibre nor expect people to continue to attend these events if these issues are not addressed. We cannot expect to attract the crowds and visitors to this great city if getting to the ground is an onerous experience.

We are now also aware that the revenue gleaned from this was a mammoth \$17,000. I am personally aware that parking inspectors were instructed to pay particular attention to parking in the Manuka vicinity on that day. Are we then able to assume that this was a result of the government's knowing that it had failed in providing adequate parking facilities in the area?

MR SESELJA (Brindabella) (4.34): I add my voice to support Mr Doszpot's motion and oppose the amendment. What we are talking about is a very straightforward, simple, inoffensive motion. Mr Doszpot has not put in all sorts of political invective in the motion; what he has simply done is state some facts in relation to events in and around Manuka Oval and to call on the government to have a parking strategy.

I would have thought most people in this place would think that is a sensible course of action, and certainly those of us who have travelled to Manuka Oval for events in recent times, as I have, have experienced significant issues with parking. I think it is quite reasonable that we call on the government to do better, to actually say, "Well, if we want to make Manuka Oval a great place to be"—and, yes, the opposition certainly supports Manuka Oval being an important place for gatherings, for cricket, for Australian Rules Football in the future and, no doubt, for other sports—"we need to do some planning because this is going to become more and more of an issue."

It is great when it sells out; it is a great thing to be at Manuka Oval when it is full. But that comes with associated traffic and parking issues. For the Prime Minister's XI game we parked at Kingston. That is not within a kilometre; that is a pretty reasonable walk. It is not a massive deal, I suppose, when you have got lots of time. But it is reasonable that, in a place where public transport is not convenient—and the member for Brindabella Andrew Wall very clearly set out the challenges for people getting there with public transport—most Canberrans will continue to rely on their cars for these types of events.

That being the case, what the opposition is calling for and what Mr Doszpot is very sensibly calling for in his motion is for some planning so that in the future things do not get worse but get better. We can look at what temporary car parking options there are, we can look at the traffic management and make sure that it is in place. We certainly want to see a pleasant experience for as many people as possible. We want them to come back—it is good for traders in the Manuka and Kingston areas. If we make it convenient and pleasant, we will have the potential to grow the oval, to grow the facility, but we must make sure we have the underpinning plans to make it a really good experience for everyone.

I think Mr Doszpot is spot-on; I commend him for bringing forward this motion. I think it is a very sensible one, and we are seeing this majority Greens-Labor government again opposing something simply because it has not been brought forward by them. I commend Mr Doszpot's motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That **Mr Barr**'s amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Mr Barr | Ms Gallagher | Mr Coe | Mr Seselja |
| Ms Berry | Mr Gentleman | Mr Doszpot | Mr Smyth |
| Dr Bourke | Ms Porter | Mrs Dunne | Mr Wall |
| Ms Burch | Mr Rattenbury | Mr Hanson | |
| Mr Corbell | | Mrs Jones | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

MR DOSZPOT (Molonglo) (4.41): I would like to make these concluding statements regarding my motion. I must say that I am very disappointed at the government, mainly for being almost in denial. Mr Barr, some of the things that you said in your preamble to your amendment actually were parts of a plan that we are seeking to consolidate, that we are seeking the government look at and consolidate. The fact is that you have mentioned all of these hotels and other parking areas around there, but what sort of plan was there for everyone to be made aware of all of these locations?

Mr Barr: There is a map.

MR DOSZPOT: The distribution of such a plan was not in everyone's—

Mr Barr: The *Canberra Times*, mate, on the website.

MR DOSZPOT: Okay. What we are saying is that all of those are parts of the elements of a plan. But the fact is that we commend those parts of the plan that were there, including the buses.

But the reality, Mr Barr, and you know this, is that there are no 7,500 vacant car parking spaces waiting there for people to park in. That is the reality that you have to face up to. You are in denial about that. And until you do, you are waiting for your—

Mr Barr interjecting—

MR DOSZPOT: I—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Gentleman): Minister Barr! Mr Doszpot, if you could just address your comments through here it might—

MR DOSZPOT: My apologies, Mr Assistant Speaker. The reality is that there is a problem in Manuka regardless of whether there is any match on at Manuka Oval. There is a problem in the whole Manuka-Kingston precinct. The fact is that the lights have come in. We commend the fact that new facilities and new options that are available for our sporting enthusiasts will bring more people from the surrounding areas and will bring more people from interstate.

I sat with a group of people who came from interstate and who were very happy with what they saw at the stadium. When they went back to their cars, those very people were then faced with taking home souvenirs that Mr Smyth alluded to. They found that they were taking back quite a nice little yellow envelope as a souvenir and additional expense for their visit.

What we are talking about, Mr Barr, is to look at the good elements of what is available at the moment but recognise there is a problem. You are asking us to recognise the work that you have done. We are saying lights, good work; parking, not so good.

Members interjecting—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members! Mr Doszpot has the floor.

MR DOSZPOT: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I think we have spent a fair bit of time on this, and I think it is reaching the point where I do not think the community of Canberra deserves to have the sort of levity that Mr Barr is introducing into this at the moment.

There is a serious problem. There is an issue that our sporting community would like to see addressed, and my motion is seeking to do that. I am asking for the government to develop a parking management plan for the Manuka precinct for future games that takes into consideration the need for short-term temporary parking for large numbers of cars at major events, recognising that not everyone wants to or can avail themselves of public transport, no matter how many buses are provided or how well they are promoted.

But having asked for that as a motion, I guess I then look at recommendation 91 in the estimates committee report to the government in 2011-12. The committee recommended that the ACT government develop a comprehensive transport plan to

ensure that the additional seating capacity within Manuka Oval can be accommodated. The government response to that was that it was noted and that this would be undertaken for all large events held at Manuka Oval.

Here we are some year or so later and we are still arguing the fact that there is in fact a problem. The government, having accepted there was a problem, noted it. But here we are and the government now, in Mr Barr's estimates, is saying there is no problem, we have got 7,500 parking spots around. Mr Barr, what we are asking you to do is recognise that we do have a problem and we are asking you to make sure that this so-called commitment that you made through the estimates committee recommendation is finally taken into account.

What we asked Mr Rattenbury to consider was that this motion was not a political motion. We are simply asking for the community of Canberra to have some better facilities to enable them to enjoy some of the better options that have been presented to them. There will be more big events, and all of these will cause problems if they are not addressed, not only to the nearby community within the precinct of Manuka and Kingston but also to the businesses that operate in these areas.

In conclusion, I commend the motion and I would hope that there is some sanity, especially on Mr Rattenbury's side, to recognise the fact that our community can use a better parking plan, but until the government realises the problem it will not be addressed.

Question put:

That **Mr Doszpott's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

| Ayes 9 | | Noes 8 | |
|------------|---------------|-------------|------------|
| Mr Barr | Ms Gallagher | Mr Coe | Mr Seselja |
| Ms Berry | Mr Gentleman | Mr Doszpott | Mr Smyth |
| Dr Bourke | Ms Porter | Mrs Dunne | Mr Wall |
| Ms Burch | Mr Rattenbury | Mr Hanson | |
| Mr Corbell | | Mrs Jones | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Bushfires—management and mitigation

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (4.51): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the significant improvements in bushfire preparedness since the 2003 Canberra bushfires;
 - (b) the development and implementation of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan to manage and mitigate bushfire risk; and
 - (c) the increased investment in bushfire response capability including vehicles, facilities, communications and training;
- (2) commends the hard work of our Emergency Services Agency staff and volunteers who provide crucial community support in times of an emergency like a bushfire; and
- (3) acknowledges the recent successful operation to deal with the extreme fire danger day on 8 January 2013.

Mr Assistant Speaker, 18 January 2013 marked the 10-year anniversary of the devastating and tragic 2003 Canberra bushfires. That day in 2003 will never be forgotten by Canberrans. An extreme convergence of firestorms resulted in the deaths of four ACT residents and the burning of 164,000 hectares, nearly 70 per cent of land in the territory. Over 500 houses and most of the Mount Stromlo Observatory were destroyed. There was fire damage to a further 315 houses and major damage to various infrastructure and facilities across the city.

Ninety per cent of Namadgi national park was burnt, and severe fire damage occurred to the Tidbinbilla nature reserve, the Murrumbidgee River corridor, the Stromlo pine plantation and pine plantations west of the Murrumbidgee River. The fires also affected the ACT's water catchment and, as a result, Canberra's water supply.

In 2003 the government commissioned an inquiry by the former Commonwealth Ombudsman, Mr Ron McLeod, into the preparation for and the operational responses to those bushfires. On 4 August 2003 the then Chief Minister, on behalf of the government, accepted the report's findings and committed to implementing the 61 recommendations. On 19 December 2006 the then ACT Coroner, Ms Doogan, delivered her report and made a total of 73 recommendations, which were wide and varied. In February 2007, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Simon Corbell, announced that the government agreed with the majority of the recommendations put forward by Ms Doogan.

Following the McLeod report and the Doogan coronial inquiry, the government also requested the ACT Bushfire Council to undertake a review of the implementation of the government's agreed recommendations. The independent report was tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 18 August 2009. The Bushfire Council review acknowledged that the majority of the recommendations of the two reports overlapped to some degree, and found that 108 of the 122 recommendations had been actioned at that time.

The Bushfire Council review also identified further actions to ensure full implementation of the earlier recommendations. To substantially address these

matters, the review identified seven key actions to be undertaken. I understand that of the seven key actions identified in the Bushfire Council review, all have been implemented, with three items being of an ongoing nature.

An example of the issues that have been addressed since the Bushfire Council's review is the significant work undertaken by the ACT Rural Fire Service to strengthen links with New South Wales agencies and to participate in cross-border exercises and activities. The ESA has a memorandum of understanding with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, as well as mutual aid agreements with the surrounding New South Wales Rural Fire Service zones.

In addition to incident management and interoperability with New South Wales, the ACT Rural Fire Service has, for the last two years, participated in incident management exercises with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service at both the regional and zone level. The ACT Rural Fire Service has developed a strong rapport with surrounding New South Wales Rural Fire Service zones, and as part of that memorandum of understanding has developed a robust communications capability between the services.

There have also been cross-border operational exercises, with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service and surrounding zones participating every year in the ACT Rural Fire Service field day, when crews get the opportunity to work together in an operational environment.

Canberra may experience more catastrophic bushfires in the future; however, our response will be much different. The significant reforms implemented by the government over the last 10 years will make a huge difference to the safety and wellbeing of Canberrans during the next major bushfire.

What will be equally critical, however, in our response to the next major bushfire is the extent to which Canberrans themselves prepare for such events. Public awareness and community education play an important role in this, and significant improvements have been implemented in this area, including the use of social media, the new emergency alert system and the "prepare, act, survive" messaging to the community.

The new Emergencies Act 2004 established the position of ESA commissioner, who has the responsibility for the coordination and strategic management of the ESA. The legislation also gave each of the services unambiguous roles, and it clearly described the functions of each of the service chief officers. Similarly, the governance, management structure and operational preparedness within the ESA have been strengthened. This legislation has since been amended to provide the ESA commissioner with enhanced powers. These reforms are significant and ongoing.

Since the 2003-04 budget the government has increased the ESA's recurrent funding by approximately \$55.6 million or 169 per cent. There has been significant investment in new firefighting, specialist and command vehicles for the emergency services fleet, more firefighters and an upgrading of the emergency services facilities and equipment.

The completion of the ESA headquarters, communications centre, media briefing room and new workshop located at Fairbairn business park, Majura, has been accomplished and can be credited as the most significant enhancement to the way ESA and support service personnel operate within ESA headquarters. For the first time, all ESA support personnel have been integrated to work in the ESA's Fairbairn premises. The completion of the purpose-built ESA training facility, located at Hume, in May 2012 also provides multiservice training facilities for ESA staff and volunteers.

In addition, the ACT Rural Fire Service heli-base was completed in time for the 2011-12 bushfire season. The heli-base has the capacity to house three helicopters and has crew facilities that include meeting rooms and accommodation quarters, if needed, during extended operations. This facility has been used extensively during the current fire season and was the base for up to 17 helicopters that were responding to fires in the ACT and surrounding New South Wales during January this year. This facility is the only one of its kind in southern New South Wales and is a significant investment in firefighting capability for the ACT.

The ACT Rural Fire Service's main focus over the current bushfire season has been responding to the prolonged heatwave by ensuring that incident management teams are in place during total fire bans, ensuring that appropriate levels of fire appliances and crews are stood up and supporting New South Wales with a number of fires in the surrounding New South Wales bushfire zones.

It is pleasing to hear that there has been a surge in firefighting volunteers. Since the beginning of this year, the ACT Rural Fire Service has received 241 registrations of interest from people wanting to become an RFS volunteer. The total number of skilled RFS volunteers was 512 as of 6 February 2013.

We should also recognise the contributions of the ACT Fire and Rescue personnel as an essential and critical component of fire suppression in and around the ACT, not just in support of the ACT Rural Fire Service. This is evidenced by the deployment of ACT Fire and Rescue personnel to fight the large fires in the surrounding New South Wales region during the January fire weather days.

In a world first, Canberra researchers—including Dr Jason Sharples, who is also an RFS volunteer; Stephen Wilkes, a fire management officer with TAMS; and Rick McRae and Alan Walker from the ESA's specialist risk analysis and spatial information team—documented the world's first confirmed case of a fire tornado, using evidence collected from the devastating 2003 Canberra bushfires. This study, published in the scientific journal *Natural Hazards*, provides insight into the behaviour of thunderstorms that form over large fires, which is currently the subject of an international research effort.

The government released the strategic bushfire management plan, version 2, in October 2009. The development of this plan included consideration of the interim findings of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the coronial inquiry into the 2003 Canberra bushfires and a national framework for scaled bushfire advice and

bushfire warnings released in 2009. The plan identifies a wide range of activities for bushfire prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, which required additional funding to undertake key programs identified in the plan.

I pay tribute to the tremendous efforts of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service within the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate. Under the strategic bushfire management plan, the Parks and Conservation Service undertake hazard reduction activities and fight bushfires, through the parks brigade, across the ACT. The parks brigade is an integral member of the ACT's bushfire fighting capability and their contributions should be recognised. The efforts of the parks service and the brigade are a clear indication of how they, ACT Fire and Rescue and the ACT Rural Fire Service work in a close, collaborative and cooperative manner.

Further, under the Emergencies Act 2004, some land managers are required to prepare bushfire operational plans that are consistent with the policies and strategies in the SBMP. These plans identify detailed actions, such as hazard reduction, trail maintenance and grazing, that land managers would undertake to meet bushfire management requirements.

A series of important emergency plans have been developed or updated. From a whole-of-government perspective, the ACT emergency plan describes the responsibilities, the authorities and the mechanisms to prevent—or, if they occur, manage—emergencies and their consequences within the ACT in accordance with the requirements of the Emergencies Act 2004.

The community communication and information plan is an approved subplan of the ACT emergency plan. It clearly outlines how the government will communicate with the public when there is a threat of an emergency or an actual emergency in the territory. It details the processes for all communications staff across the government to come together to work as one with emergency services media teams to ensure a single point of truth for the dissemination of all public information during a major incident.

There has been a greater focus on community preparedness and resilience since 2003. In addition to the work undertaken by the emergency services agencies, the Community Services Directorate has worked with a number of community organisations and provided them with the tools to work with their vulnerable clients to educate them about emergencies and develop their emergency plans.

Neighbour Day, which this year falls on 31 March, is promoted as an opportunity to connect with your neighbours to watch out for each other and be ready for an emergency. A number of community organisations, including Neighbourhood Watch, are involved in promoting this concept.

Planning for an equestrian evacuation centre was implemented during the recent high fire danger period. The concept is to provide horse owners with a safe haven for their horses, enabling them to relocate animals before a fire occurs. This initiative of the ACT Equestrian Association, the Community Services Directorate, EPIC and the Rural Fire Service was well received by horse owners in Canberra and may ultimately reduce the risk of human injury by pre-emptively removing the animals and their owners from potential danger.

A range of evacuation centres are identified across Canberra and can be available whenever needed, with the support of the recovery community partners, including Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul and St John Ambulance.

In closing, on behalf of the government, I commend members of the Legislative Assembly and the ACT community, ESA personnel from Fire and Rescue, firefighters, the RFS, the SES, community fire units, mapping volunteers, staff, ambulance officers, support staff, and staff of the TAMS fire management unit for their tireless efforts in protecting the ACT and its citizens from the threat of bushfire.

MR SESELJA (Brindabella) (5.04): I rise firstly to support in particular the final part of Dr Bourke's comments in relation to our hardworking Emergency Services Agency's staff and volunteers. The opposition joins in commending the hard work that they do, the often dangerous work that they do, and we thank them for that. We thank them for putting their lives on the line to protect our community. So the opposition wholeheartedly endorses that sentiment.

There were a couple of elements of Dr Bourke's speech which I would like to touch on before I get into some other issues. He did mention some apparent successes, including the emergency alert system. I think it would be remiss of us not to comment on just how poorly that was initially rolled out with, of course, the Mitchell chemical fire in recent times. The emergency alert system simply was not up to the task. It is like so many other things from ACT Labor. Money is spent on certain things and they point to certain things happening, but when it comes to the management, when it comes to actually rolling it out and making it work in practice, we see failures. We have certainly seen that when it comes to the emergency alert system.

Dr Bourke also referred to the tragic 2003 bushfires which, of course, we all remember so vividly. I think Dr Bourke does attempt to rewrite history a little bit when it comes to that. I do not want to labour the point in relation to the 2003 bushfires. But given Dr Bourke has raised it, I think we do have to put on the record the fact that the community was let down by the government and by the leadership of this government, including Mr Corbell as a member of that cabinet. There was a collective failure of that cabinet to do all they could to warn Canberrans of what was coming when they knew it was coming two days before. I think that will always be a stain on this government, that they did not act when, clearly, they had the information at that point on that Thursday before the bushfires to act.

There is one other thing that I think is worth raising in relation to the 2003 bushfires. I think it has been touched on by the likes of Ric Hingee in recent times. Having failed in various ways but also having faced what was an extraordinarily difficult circumstance—I do not think anyone denies that we faced an amazing fire storm in its ferocity—notwithstanding the failures to heed warning and in other areas, the response of the government at that time where it claimed it would support changes, where it claimed it would do everything has not been honoured. My colleague Mr Smyth I am sure will highlight some of the areas where they have not honoured that commitment to adopt those recommendations.

Finally on this point, I think what was most disappointing to bushfire victims was in fact the way that, when it appeared there would be some accountability for this government, they did all they could to undermine that coronial process, including by attempting to remove the coroner who was simply doing her job to get to the bottom of this issue. I think that is one of the things that still hurts bushfire victims.

It is one thing to be tested and to fail in the face of a natural disaster, but it is another thing altogether not to honour your commitments afterwards and to try and remove accountability by getting rid of the independent judicial officer looking into this. I think that will, again, forever be a stain on this government and on the leadership of this government, some of whom, of course, are still here in the form of Mr Corbell and, indeed, the current Chief Minister.

As I said earlier, we certainly support the work of our emergency services staff and volunteers. There is no doubt, as is implicit I think in this motion, that there have been additional funds put towards bushfire management, and that is a good thing. We certainly in the opposition do not begrudge the government spending more money on protecting the community from bushfires. What we always do is try and make sure that when they spend it, they spend it well. There have been, unfortunately, some examples in recent years where that has not been the case.

We can look at, of course, the Emergency Services Agency headquarters where we saw a massive blowout in costs. Of course, there was the fire shed that did not fit trucks. A \$60-odd million blowout in that ESA headquarters is an example of how money has not been spent well.

We do not mind—we support, in fact, very strongly—the government committing additional resources to this area. But they need to do it well so we get maximum value for money, so that we get the absolute best possible equipment for our money. If you cannot manage these major projects, of course, it means that there is less money for this important task and there is less money for other important tasks as well.

We have seen some of the other failures which I am sure Mr Smyth will touch on as well. I think we have seen some interesting things in terms of funding and in terms of approach. One of the recommendations, of course, following the bushfires was for an independent agency. We have long advocated for that. The government walked away from that, even though it said it would adopt all of the recommendations. We believe that that is a vulnerability.

The 2012 report on government services highlighted that ACT government real funding in fire service organisations had decreased from \$55.6 million in 2009-10 to \$49.4 million in 2010-11. That is a \$6.2 million drop in real funding for an important service to the community. Of course, we see in the 2013 report on government services that there is an increase in that funding in 2011-12 to \$64.5 million.

The question is: why the drop in the years prior? So there has been a bit of an ad hoc approach. It has not been a consistent increase of the funding that we need. We have seen it go down and then go up again. But we certainly welcome additional resources.

We certainly welcome them when they are spent well, and that is what we always call for when government is managing these things.

Of course, we have seen what has happened in a number of other areas. We have seen the ESA requiring funds from the Treasurer's advance in 2011-12 for operational capabilities but, of course, not necessarily for ongoing purposes. When you look at the government's other priorities where it does throw money away, where it has questionable priorities, you do question why this money would not have been provided in an ongoing way.

Further to this, we have seen the federal Labor government end funding for the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. The Bushfire CRC has made an enormous contribution to bushfire efforts since its establishment, including raising the understanding of extreme fire behaviour, better protecting firefighters and improving prescribed burning strategies.

Whilst the opposition are acknowledging some of the improvements that are there and we are certainly supporting the sentiment of congratulating our ESA staff and volunteers, I think we have had some very important voices in this debate raising some concerns in recent times. I think we need to be mindful of those. It is worth putting some of those on record here, because certainly some of those are people whom I respect, people whom the opposition respects.

We have seen the 10-year anniversary of the Canberra bushfires in January of this year. Of course, Phil Cheney studied bushfires for more than 40 years and led the CSIRO's bushfire research division. He was interviewed by the ABC recently, and he stated:

... the mountain forests are accumulating fuel and in my view if they're to be managed properly and to limit the spread of fire ... we need to do something.

The concern was also shared by Val Jeffery, who ran at the last ACT election. For years he led the independent Bushfire Council that was responsible for fire management. Val Jeffery notes the high runs of fuel into the built-up areas. When asked, "How do you think the Canberra region would fare if it saw another repeat of the circumstances that we saw 10 years ago?" Val Jeffery replied:

Canberra will suffer a lot more because of the simple fact the fuel structure and the bush fire organisation's changed that much that if we get that bad day again it's inevitable that we have those big losses.

I hope that on this Val Jeffery is wrong. I hope that the warnings of people like Mr Cheney and, indeed, Mr Jeffery are taken seriously by this government, because we do not know what the future holds when it comes to weather. What we do know is that we will suffer from dry conditions at some point in the future—maybe next year, maybe the year after, maybe in five years time. We do not know when the next drought will come. We do not know when the next potentially disastrous firestorm day will come.

What we need to do is to be ever vigilant. Listening to the voices of experience of people like Phil Cheney and Val Jeffery is critically important. We believe there are some improvements that can be made, notwithstanding that some improvements have been made over the last few years. As I say, Mr Smyth will touch on that.

I will simply close by again commending our brave volunteers and staff. We thank them for their work. We in the opposition will always support their efforts. We will certainly hold the government to account in making sure the government is properly allocating resources and properly managing projects to ensure that all Canberrans can have confidence that everything possible is being done to keep them safe from bushfire disasters.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (5.15): I commend Dr Bourke on bringing forward this motion today on bushfire readiness and the very dedicated, ongoing, consistent and just plain hard work of all of our ESA staff and volunteers in the work they do in preparing for and responding to the threat of fire in our community.

There is no doubt that since 2003 as a community, as a government, we have come a long way. It is frequently the question asked by the media as each summer rolls around: have we learnt the lessons? Are we better prepared? Where do we stand today compared to 2003? I think this summer we were able to very clearly and comprehensively answer that question.

As I indicated during question time, the question was answered in what we did as an Emergency Services Agency, as Rural Fire Service volunteers, as Fire and Rescue personnel, as a community. What did we do when lightning again started fires in the Namadgi National Park? Perhaps I can answer that by saying what we did not do. We did not let them burn unattended. We did not let them grow. We did not think that it would be all right. We acted and we acted decisively and comprehensively in response.

Crews were immediately dispatched. Aerial appliances were immediately deployed. Remote area firefighting teams were immediately put into place. Bulldozers that were on standby were immediately sent. Those fires were wrapped up and they were contained within 24 to 48 hours. It was an outstanding effort by our emergency services personnel, particularly by the Rural Fire Service volunteers, supported by the paid members of the Parks Brigade, supported by other ESA services and their staff. And the fires were wrapped up. So when the hot, windy weather came in three or four days time, the threat was not there. That, more than anything, says a lot about what we have learned from 2003. It is not the full story, but it is a great example of what we are now doing.

I would like to outline today some of the key measures the government has put in place and continues to deploy to make sure that our city is as prepared as possible for fire danger. It is the case that we cannot fireproof our landscape. We cannot prevent

fire completely. We can seek to ameliorate its impacts, but Australia is a landscape of fire, and we have to be prepared for it. We have to be ready to respond to it, and we have to do everything feasible to try and ameliorate those risks.

The government have made significant investments in bushfire response capability. We have invested in new stations, in new sheds, in new vehicles, and in equipment and training. I would like to talk about some of those things today. Mr Seselja talks about allegations that sheds were not big enough for vehicles. That claim is untrue. That claim is untrue. It was made, though it is untrue, and those sheds, particularly the Jerrabomberra shed—I think that was mentioned—continues to perform well.

Of course, the government has provided capital funding of over \$1 million for a new shed out at Tidbinbilla for the Tidbinbilla RFS brigade. This state-of-the-art facility provides that brigade on the western interface with the ACT with the facilities it needs to help protect the local rural community in the Tidbinbilla valley and surrounds. It also acts as an important capability, a potential refuge, for fire for that community as well as a staging point and an operational control point should that be needed out on the western interface.

I had the great honour of officially opening that shed in August last year, and the response from the local rural community and the brigade members was overwhelmingly positive about what a great facility they now have for the work that they do every day as RFS volunteers.

The government has provided, as I mentioned earlier, over \$2 million for major works to upgrade RFS facilities at the Rivers and Jerrabomberra brigades. Again, those facilities really are state of the art for volunteer brigades, not just here in the ACT. I would say that they are equal to anything you can see in New South Wales, Victoria or South Australia. It is a great resource for our volunteers and a clear demonstration of this government's commitment to the work that they do.

There has also been the significant investments in the new ESA headquarter facilities at Fairbairn, the outstanding new ESA training facility out near Symonston, Hume, on the Monaro Highway and, of course, the new RFS heli-base at Hume, which has been given a really good workout over the summer to date and is performing exceptionally well.

Of course, it is not just about response capability, as important as that is. Information preparedness is just as important. The government continue to improve and refine our governance arrangements for the management and coordination of our response. We have strengthened statutory arrangements, and we have put in place new education campaigns and public messaging arrangements to make sure the community get the information they need.

For example, there have been very effective programs such as Farm FireWise, which is engaging with rural lessees on how they can better prepare their properties for fire. There has been the StormSafe campaign, the winter home fire safety campaign and the road accident awareness and bushfire awareness campaigns. So there has been a comprehensive campaign in our community that is an ongoing effort of the ESA.

Most striking has been the award received by the ESA at the Resilient Australia Awards in November 2012 for its single point of truth campaign. Promoting the ESA's social media, online media and other media presence as the single point of truth, the place to go to get clear, accurate and timely advice on emergencies, was recognised nationally in the Resilient Australia Awards.

The type of deployment that is occurring as a result of the single point of truth includes significant upgrades to our online media presence, both through the website presence, but also through Twitter and Facebook. We have seen a considerable response from the community. We see more and more members of the community turning to social media for information and looking for that advice from our emergency services.

We have seen big increases in the number of people subscribing to these different forms of social media. For example, just during the elevated fire danger period in January this year, social media statistics showed that likes on Facebook went from 1,800 to nearly 8,000 and the number of followers on Twitter went from 4,200 to 5,200, now sitting at around 5,300. So there was a really big increase in people using social media to get their information.

This is a global trend, an Australia-wide trend, we are seeing in the emergency service space. We are seeing this very effectively deployed in Queensland by Queensland police in particular. They have an enormous social media presence. What we are seeing now is that social media is acting as a more timely source of information than the traditional messaging which can occur through the issuing of a media statement and normal, more traditional, distribution to media outlets, as important as that remains.

Finally, I would like to talk about the very important work that Fire and Rescue do, particularly in supporting the community fire units program. Of course, the government has invested significant resources in building the community fire units program. We now have 50 CFUs across the city with approximately 1,000 volunteers engaged in those 50 units, 48 of which are active. We are also providing significant support to Fire and Rescue directly in terms of upgrades to equipment, rescue material, bush firefighter clothing, breathing apparatus and vehicles. There are some very important investments there.

Finally, I am very proud of the work we have done in upgrading the ESA vehicle fleet. We have seen 11 new ACT Fire and Rescue vehicles deployed, 12 community fire units, 18 ambulance vehicles, 26 RFS vehicles replaced, six SES vehicles and one general ESA vehicle. It is a real demonstration of the government's commitment to greater equipment on the ground.

Thanks, Dr Bourke, for bringing this motion to the attention of the Assembly today.

MR SMYTH (Brindabella) (5.25): It is an important motion, and, again, I would also thank Dr Bourke for bringing it on. I am not sure who put his speech together, but perhaps they should have delved a little deeper into some of the things that did happen and then were undone.

Yes, the McLeod report had a swag of recommendations. Most were actioned positively, and then most were undone. I think the most startling one is recommendation 53:

The separate organisations that make up the emergency services group that is coordinated by the Emergency Services Bureau, and the associated arrangements, should be replaced by a statutory authority, the ACT Emergency Services Authority.

And of course that happened. But it did not last very long, because it did not meet the government's budget requirements.

One of the concerns that certainly come out of the volunteers continually is the state of the budget and some of the loss of funding that has occurred. And it would be good if perhaps the minister, and he would have time to do it, stood up and told members what has happened to the budget of the RFS. We know there were some significant cuts to fire funding over a decade that resulted in the loss of about \$10 million. It has bounced back in the last year. But there is an inconsistency in the approach and the inconsistency leads to an inconsistent outcome, and there are many volunteers that are concerned with that.

Part 2—and I do not think anybody would disagree with it—commends the hard work of the staff and the volunteers. It is very hard to disagree with that. When we look at part 3—and it acknowledges the recent successful operations to deal with the extreme fire danger on 8 January 2013; indeed, the operations were successful; they put out the fires that occurred—there is concern among a number of volunteers that I have spoken to since we were given warning of the motion.

Indeed, it was curious that on the day when the government had the motion, they also had the question about this matter in question time. Not everyone is convinced—and many volunteers have told me the jury is out—of our ability. This is volunteers critiquing themselves and saying: “Yes, we did a good job, but we are not sure because there were not a significant number of fires on a significant number of days or indeed a large-campaign fire over a four, five, six, seven or eight-day period.” Many of the older, senior volunteers are still quite concerned about that eventuality.

There is a lot of new blood in the brigades. Consequently, there is a lack of experience. A lot of it is not perfect, and most of it, in many people's minds, has not been tested. People told me the reaction to the fires on the 8th out at Wallaroo Road and other places was good, but many thought they had not been pushed hard. Many have memories of 2001. Remember, this is a government that after December 2001, when fires swept all the way up to the entrance to Government House, had recommendations that really were not actioned so that in 2003 we were probably less prepared than we had been in 2001. So there are volunteers out there in the know who are telling me the jury is out and they are concerned with cuts to RFS funding.

I would like to praise the former commissioner Mark Crossweller. He did, of course, come out of New South Wales RFS and had a particularly big focus on RFS in the

ACT. I think the EMA's gain is our loss, and I am sure everyone will work with the new commissioner. But there are still things to be done.

For instance, I heard Dr Bourke quote from the 10th anniversary report to the minister. I think he said something like 108 out of 122 recommendations from the two reports had been actioned. I am not aware that that report has been published. I know that it is with the minister, and it would be great if that report were published so that we know what has been actioned and what has not been actioned and what are the gaps there. If there are some things that have not been done all this time afterwards then you have to ask the question: why?

I understand the minister got that report in December, and I would be very curious, Minister Corbell, as to when you might be choosing to release that report and make it public. I think the mute nature of the minister, who is not known for being shy in this place, indicates that we might not be able to see that report too soon. But it is a shame if the Bushfire Council has done a report, a report that I know they intended to be public, and it is not made public. You would have to ask the question: why is the minister still sitting on it when he has had it for a couple of months? And that is a shame.

Mr Corbell rattled off a long list of achievements. Yes, some of them are achievements and some of them, quite frankly, are not. The cost blowouts, the cost overruns, the lack of funding, the constant tripping of ESA to the Treasurer's advance for top-up because the government does not fund them properly, and then it is hidden under additional operational requirements—these simply show that the government is not committed long term to getting the ESA and particularly the RFS on a sustainable footing. There have been blowouts in the budget to provide the new headquarters. People are telling me there is a lack of space at the training facility and I understand on occasion they have to put tents up so that they can change in them.

I note Dr Bourke and the minister did not mention FireLink. FireLink, \$5 million gone. All systems have a teething period. I am told the providers of FireLink had worked out the problem but the minister said, "No more." It was such an embarrassment they would not do it. So they threw that money away, and that is a shame.

I have a concern that we do not have enough of an influence on or a commitment to public education. Again, some of the long-term volunteers and a couple of the captains have said to me they are very concerned at the cutbacks, particularly to community education. For instance, my brigade regularly goes down to a number of schools in the valley. Again this year, with the captain's agreement, we took units down to the Holy Family Primary School at Gowrie and we put as many kids as we could through the fire truck, through the tanker, so that they could have an understanding of what it was. All of the schools run units on awareness for their kids. We need to be backing that up. And when you have people saying that they are not happy with the cutbacks in community education, I think that is a shame.

There are two other matters that I think need to be spoken to. Sorry, I will just go to one other, the claim by Mr Corbell that the shed claims are untrue. The volunteers at

those sheds tell me that they cannot back their trucks in and then open their doors. So either the volunteers are lying or somebody else is. There was controversy there at the time. It was never refuted or proven to be wrong and, until the minister can prove it wrong, it will stand.

Then, of course, there was the claim of the wonderful success of Tidbinbilla. Yes, Tidbinbilla shed is pretty good, and it is pretty good because of years of lobbying by and pressure on this government from the opposition. It was many years late and if you recall late last year, when it was close to being opened, there were complaints it was incomplete. And some basic things, even down to a barbecue space and perhaps a bit of air conditioning in at least one room so that it could be cool for training, had been cut. Again, there was pressure from the opposition. In a very tight budget they had to cancel so many other little projects to make sure that Tidbinbilla was complete when the minister opened it so that it would not be an embarrassment. And that is the truth, and I think we all know it.

There are, I believe, significant gaps in education and research in Australia in regard to the bushfire threat. And I think it is very sad that the federal government is now cutting the funding to the federal Bushfire CRC. There will be a disaster resilient CRC which could continue some bushfire research, but it is not the same thing. In the summer edition, the current issue, of *Fire Australia*, the magazine for those interested in these things, there is a great article by Richard Thornton, who is the Bushfire CRC deputy CEO and research director, about the 100 fire notes that the CRC has produced. The fire notes are briefings, information packs on issues. But the interesting thing is that Richard goes on to say:

During this time, more than 100 research fellows and other researchers were funded for periods of three years or more, greatly boosting the capability for research in Australia and New Zealand.

Although much of this output is captured in *Fire Notes*, this ongoing capacity is brittle and reliant on further funding to maintain the momentum.

That momentum has just been stopped. It has been stopped by a government that has fallen into complacency and is saying, "We have not had some major fires for a little while. Therefore we do not have to fund it." 2009 is only four years ago, when they had the disastrous fires in Victoria. But any cutting of funds to the Bushfire CRC is short-sighted and, indeed, the funding should be expanded. I have said many times there should be a bushfire institute in this country, a bushfire institute of Australia, where research is coordinated and is taken seriously.

The other side of that, of course, is commemoration and education through perhaps a museum. There is a great push for—and I was very pleased to help announce during the campaign that we would put \$100,000 for a feasibility study into—an ACT Rural Fire Service museum. And I think that needs to happen. We will lose the artefacts, we will lose the knowledge, we will lose the memory, we will lose the stories. When you do that, you repeat the mistakes. I think in this country there is also room for a national museum. Indeed, one of the things we do not have is a national memorial, a national monument to bushfires and those who have suffered. That would be invaluable. (*Time expired.*)

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.35): I thank Dr Bourke for raising this issue today. I think we would all agree that there have been many lessons learned, from all perspectives and agencies, about how we can better prepare for bushfires here in the ACT. The current strategic bushfire management plan has had many iterations in its drafting process. The ACT Bushfire Council, which includes representatives from a broad range of relevant agencies, spent many years working through some quite difficult issues to come to the plan that we now have in place. Finding the right balance between ensuring that we minimise the risk of future fires, making sure we have the right infrastructure in place for when there are fires and conserving our precious ecosystems has been a very complex area.

On behalf of the Greens, I would also like to thank the Emergency Services Agency staff and volunteers for their ongoing work, and especially, of course, including last month's work. It is reassuring to live in a city that is so much better prepared for bushfire than ever before and which has a well-coordinated response team. We have heard from Dr Bourke today about the huge efforts put in by so many volunteers and agencies last month. As the minister responsible, I would like to take this opportunity to raise the important role that TAMS, notably the Parks and Conservation Service, have also played in this area.

As Dr Bourke has pointed out, the government has undertaken a large amount of work since 2003 in implementing the strategic bushfire management plan. TAMS plays a significant role in this through implementing fuel reduction measures across the entire territory. This work ranges from hazard reduction burning, mowing, slashing and grazing, depending on the area, and the ecological or urban management context.

The ACT Parks and Conservation Service manages over 75 per cent of the land in the ACT, which I think most people acknowledge is a huge job. Sitting underneath the fire management plan are a number of subregional fire plans, and these are what underpin the detail of fire prevention plans for each area. You can imagine the difficulties around needing plans which address the diversity of vegetation types and the differences in management of delicate ecosystem types, such as the sphagnum bogs in Namadgi, compared to areas such as those with lots of pine wildling regrowth, or areas which abut the urban interface.

The fact that the government now have a much better picture of what the various vegetation types are across the territory, what the best land management practices are for each one, which ones need to be burned and how to best monitor and assess fuel loads, which ones are too delicate and instead should be hand-slashed and so on means that we are better prepared to withstand the climatic conditions which we expect to come over the next few years due to climate change.

Certainly, predictions from agencies such as the CSIRO and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are warning us that it is only going to get hotter and drier as we move into the future. In that context I think it is a relief to know that our land managers in the ACT are closely monitoring fuel loads across the territory and have a

much more sophisticated understanding of how to manage those fuel loads and a consistent plan to undertake that management. I think that is reassuring for the Canberra community.

The ACT Rural Fire Service worked with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service to undertake a number of preparatory measures in the lead-up to the 2012-13 bushfire season, including completion of upgrades to the Mount Franklin and Cotter Hut roads, enabling access for heavy firefighting equipment into a remote area of Namadgi national park. They also undertook significant upgrades to the Stockyard Spur walking track, delivering enhanced protection to water catchment values.

So far this season a total of 21 hazard reduction burns have been completed, covering approximately 300 hectares. A further 21 burns, covering another 12,000 hectares, is scheduled for completion before the end of the financial year. Two of these burns cover over 10,000 hectares between them in Namadgi national park and are currently being planned to ensure ecological values are protected. Fuel reduction works have commenced in the Molonglo River corridor to ensure the safety of the nearby urban development whilst ensuring the protection of endangered species habitat along the Molonglo River.

As has been discussed today, last month we saw lightning strikes on 8 January which initially ignited two fires in the national park. The work that was done before 8 January saved us from a major fire event in Namadgi. The very prompt and aggressive attack by our RFS volunteers and parks brigade personnel in Namadgi in getting on top of three fires over the next few days meant that those fires were not able to burn and run into the national park in a major way.

The first fire was near Sentry Box peak in the far south of Namadgi, a particularly inaccessible part of the park. Specially trained TAMS staff formed two remote area firefighting teams with Rural Fire Service volunteers. Both teams were helicopter-winchd into the area to quickly construct a firebreak around the blaze and guide water bombing helicopters onto the fire. Over the ensuing days, the remote area firefighting teams were able to completely extinguish the blaze before the onset of extreme fire weather returned the following week.

The second fire, north of Mount Ginini, was able to be more easily accessed by crews in firefighting vehicles. The recent upgrade of the Mount Franklin Road completed by TAMS in 2012 enabled heavy bulldozers to gain access to the fire ground. Prior to these upgrade works, heavy vehicles such as bulldozers, which are invaluable in firefighting efforts, could not gain access to this area of the park. Bulldozers were guided around sensitive subalpine bog habitat, home to the endangered corroboree frog, and a mineral earth trail was constructed around the fire. Together with the efforts of parks firefighters and water bombing helicopters, the Ginini fire was kept out of the very sensitive sphagnum bog habitat and also extinguished before the onset of extreme fire weather the following week.

The success in quickly containing the fire at Mount Ginini can be directly attributed to the significant amount of bushfire preparation and infrastructure work that has been

completed since 2003 by staff from across the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. I would like to thank them and the ACT firefighters for their work in suppressing the fire because it meant that the impact on the habitat of northern corroboree frogs was absolutely minimised.

In December I was lucky enough to be taken out to Ginini Flats to look at the bogs and the corroboree frog habitat. I was very impressed by the recovery the area had made since the 2003 fires which had a terrible impact. Although 26 hectares of land was burnt in Namadgi national park on 8 January, the fire front stopped within metres of the significant Ginini Flats, a wetland of international significance listed under the Ramsar convention.

In conclusion, I would simply wrap up by saying that the severe hot weather in January highlighted the importance of fire preparation work and the hazard reduction program to ensure the territory remains prepared for future bushfires. I think it is fair to say the effectiveness and respect of the ACT Parks and Conservation fire management unit can be attributed to many years of hard work, leadership and teamwork. The fire management unit are highly respected and often requested to assist with interstate and international deployments. Indeed, they are so well trained in forest fires in both remote areas and on the forest and rural land interface that 10 people from the fire management unit will be deployed at the end of this week to support the current fire effort in Victoria. They will be heading there for three weeks.

Mr Smyth touched on this, but I would like to note that the funding for the national bushfire CRC will be ending as of 1 July this year, which is a great disappointment, as we know how complex fire management and prevention is. It is only through such collaboration, analysis of various strategies and techniques and long-term planning that we are now truly getting better at bushfire mitigation and management across the country. I think that is particularly the case in the ACT.

Coming back to the heart of this motion, the government has worked hard at long-term planning. Certainly, since I have become the minister and have had a particular responsibility and interest in this area I have been impressed by the dedicated work of a range of people across the ACT government to ensure that the territory is as well prepared as it can be.

I know that Mr Corbell recently pointed out that the ACT government cannot fireproof the ACT. We are lucky to live in the bush capital and, while we can mitigate the risk, we cannot prevent or stop bushfires completely from breaking out. We need to do our best to minimise the likelihood of fires and the effects of those fires—around our houses, around the urban fringes and in appropriate places through both our nature parks and national parks.

My amendment simply adds to Dr Bourke's motion a particular acknowledgement of the work done through the ACT Parks and Conservation staff. Around 150 or so staff are engaged. There is the regular staff and then a big team that are engaged on a seasonal basis. I would commend my amendment to the Assembly to acknowledge that particular effort. I now move the amendment:

Add:

“(4) commends the ACT Parks and Conservation Service staff for the significant amount of bushfire preparation and infrastructure work completed since 2003, including extensive fire trail maintenance throughout Namadgi and recruitment and training programs to bolster the Service’s fire fighting capacity.”.

Amendment agreed to.

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (5.46): I thank members for their speeches and words of support for this motion. All of us agree, as has been said today, that we cannot fireproof our landscape. The experience of catastrophic bushfires is a real risk for us in Canberra. We all agree that we have learnt a tremendous amount from our experiences in 2003. We all agree that the hard work of the ESA staff, ACT Parks and Conservation staff and the volunteers is very worthy of our commendation.

Two things stand out for me from the most recent fire season, which the minister alluded to in his speech: firstly, the aggressive response to attack remote area lightning strikes—clearly a major change in our behaviour from 2003—and, secondly, the community communication and information plan, a plan to bring all communication staff and government together to work as one emergency services media team to provide a single point of truth communicating clearly with our community. I think these are two of the most important things that come out of what we learned in 2003. They have been highlighted in the minister’s speech and have stood us in good stead in this most recent fire season. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Order of the day—postponement

Ordered that order of the day No 5 private members’ business be postponed until a later hour.

Roads—footpaths

MR WALL (Brindabella) (5.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the significant number of footpaths and shared paths in disrepair across the ACT;
- (b) the ACT Government’s failure to maintain footpaths and shared paths across the ACT; and

- (c) the length of time between identification of a footpath or shared path in need of repair and actual repair work undertaken; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) routinely publish the location and number of footpaths and shared paths identified as being in need of repair and/or maintenance across the ACT; and
 - (b) ensure that an accurate footpath and shared path maintenance/repair schedule is published on the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate website by the close of business on 28 February 2013.

I raise this motion today in response to many constituents who have raised issues with me both prior to my election while campaigning and since my election to this place. Whether it was at Lanyon Marketplace, Erindale or Chisholm, there was always at least one person at every shopping centre visit I made who raised the issue of footpaths, either in need of repair, damaged, missing or just downright dangerous. The common theme among all of these complaints was that the constituents had raised their concerns before, either with the government or via Canberra Connect, yet still no action had been taken to fix the problem. There are a significant number of footpaths and shared paths in disrepair across the ACT and this government has failed in its attempts to maintain and repair the network in a timely fashion.

There are countless footpaths that have been identified in need of repair that have not been repaired within months and sometimes even years. Recently I, along with many other members of this place, was contacted by a constituent who lives in Fadden. This constituent has a young family and is a regular user of footpaths and shared paths in his suburb. I would like to quote from the correspondence, as I feel these views represent those that are common amongst many Canberrans in my electorate of Brindabella. I quote from the email I received:

Recently, residents of Fadden were subject to a rates increase, which most will agree is an occurrence from time to time that reflects rises in the cost of maintaining infrastructure etc. However, in line with a rates increase, residents have the expectation the infrastructure is being properly maintained. I have attached images of some areas of footpath in Fadden that are poorly maintained and unsafe for pedestrians.

The photos that he attached illustrated areas out the front of the Fadden Primary School and nearby laneways that are used by families every day. The images also noted the footpath in front of the school and nearby the shops where some weeds were in excess of half a metre high. He goes on to allude that he has children who often use the paths and on a recent occasion when he and his 11-year-old son were running in the area he tripped on some of the undulating footpaths along Bugden and Bramston streets in Fadden.

I have said previously that this email epitomises what the majority of constituents have said to me over the course of at least the last year and a half. Taxpayers expect

more for their money and they do not like being ignored. It seems to me that this government, who has been in power for 10 years and counting, is continuing to play catch-up when it comes to core infrastructure.

Whether we turn our minds to their track record on delivery of major infrastructure projects or we go to the smaller projects, the pattern is the same—consumers at offices across the city are shaking their head in dismay at the sheer lack of vision that sees several smaller road projects in the same region commenced at the same time, leaving motorists in the middle of a perfect storm of gridlock during peak hour.

Will the government heed the message delivered loud and clear to them by the people of Canberra and, in particular, south Woden and Tuggeranong valley at last year's election? Will they pay more attention to the little things that matter every day to Canberrans? About that, I am not sure.

Canberra is an ageing city and it would not be reasonable to expect every footpath or shared path in every suburb to be fixed the moment someone raises concerns. However, in saying that, it is also unreasonable to expect to wait years to see repairs made. It is also unreasonable to expect that these core maintenance issues are not the subject of a more strategic plan or schedule.

I am sure the minister will be very quick to point out that there have been a number of studies, reviews or reports and maybe even some feasibility studies commissioned on the state of footpaths in the territory. I must point out that all of these mean very little to the average pedestrian trying to negotiate Canberra's suburban footpaths. One report that does stand out on the TAMS website is the report titled *Cycling and Pedestrian Network—Priority Infrastructure for Capital Works*, dated February 2011. The TAMS website states that this report was commissioned in 2009 to review, for the second time, the 2007 priority report.

The question must be asked: are we really getting anywhere and is work actually getting done? The Territory and Municipal Services annual report from 2011-12 tells us that there are 2,190 kilometres of footpaths in the ACT. It also tells us that only 27,000 square metres of the network received any maintenance during that time frame. Again, I reiterate that it would be unreasonable to expect from any government that maintenance and repair work such as footpaths should be tackled immediately after a phone call is taken or a complaint received. However, I think it is reasonable to make it easy for the public to see when they can expect to see repair work undertaken.

In anticipation of Mr Rattenbury moving his amendment, I am pleased to see that there has been an acknowledgement of the issues. While we do understand that it would take considerable resources to list each individual footpath in need of repair, we are happy with the compromise demonstrated in Mr Rattenbury's pending amendment.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo—Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Housing, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for Ageing) (5.53): I thank Mr Wall for moving this motion today. I appreciate that he has obviously taken a real interest in these

issues and has been approached by a good number of constituents. I thank him for bringing the matter up today and giving us the chance to talk about it. Certainly walking and cycling are key travel modes for Canberra, and it is certainly a goal of mine to help increase the numbers of Canberrans using walking and cycling as prime means of transport.

Mr Wall is also probably aware that the Greens, in their crossbench role, have put a lot of effort into improving walking and cycling facilities in Canberra. The 2008 parliamentary agreement, for example, secured an increase in recurrent funding for cycling infrastructure to \$3.6 million per annum, and it provided \$2.5 million to address the maintenance backlog and implementation of signage on the cycling network. It also secured an additional \$500,000 per annum recurrent above existing levels for footpath upgrades and maintenance.

Further, the 2012 parliamentary agreement provides over four years an additional \$15 million above current budget funding for improved walking and cycling infrastructure, including maintenance, new paths and lanes, new pedestrian crossings and more. I think these are great initiatives that will see real on-the-ground improvements for local Canberrans walking or cycling around their neighbourhoods or to work, shops or other locations. I think it will make a real difference addressing what Mr Wall has referred to as “disrepair” and the “failure to maintain” Canberra’s paths, although I think that this was somewhat of a uniquely negative take on Canberra’s walking and cycling network.

Mr Wall has been in contact with my office several times already since he has arrived at the Assembly, raising issues about particular paths or roads in his electorate. The reality is—and I am sure Mr Wall appreciates this—that there are and always will be various repairs or improvements that need to be made to this essential infrastructure in the ACT.

The ACT government has a vast network of road infrastructure assets managed by Territory and Municipal Services, and this exceeds \$10 billion in total replacement value. It is quite incredible when you think about the scale. It includes 6,580 kilometres of roads, 976 bridges, 2,190 kilometres of footpaths, 73,000 street lights, around 350 kilometres of cyclepaths and 290 sets of traffic lights. As members of this Assembly appreciate, this is a large asset base and its management occupies many good people within TAMS for a lot of their time.

Mr Wall’s interest today is footpaths and cyclepaths, so I would like to outline some of the processes that are already in place in TAMS covering the inspection, assessment and programming of footpaths and cyclepaths repairs. TAMS have a number of staff who inspect the condition of road assets, including footpaths and cyclepaths, with a focus on town centres and group centres. In addition to this, members of the public report locations where they consider repairs are necessary via Canberra Connect and the fix my street online reporting on the TAMS website. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the very popular fix my street website will soon have a mobile application, which will make reporting even easier.

Each week there are typically over 80 specific requests covering footpaths and cyclepaths, ranging from requests for new paths to repairs of existing paths. Over the last three years, a total of 4,500 requests have been recorded by TAMS covering footpaths and cyclepaths. As a new minister, I can tell Mr Wall that it is eye opening to see just how many requests come across my desk, as is the volume of work that TAMS does to assess and respond to them. As with anything, the merit of these requests also varies.

Once a request has been received, it is inspected, the priority for attention assessed and then it is included in the system for repair and or replacement. As I am sure Mr Wall can appreciate, the length of time between identification of a footpath or shared path in need of attention and the actual work will be based on the assessment of the priority for repair, serviceability of the existing path and its location. Perhaps as a current example, members may have noticed over the weekend the impact of the Multicultural Festival through some parts of Civic with the forklifts moving around to put in the tents and the like. We have seen quite some damage to the paving through various parts of Civic, and that is scheduled to be repaired tomorrow because it is such a high-use area and, therefore, presents such a high level of risk. I have spoken to the agency and we are getting on to that one straightaway. I think that demonstrates how that prioritisation system works.

In that vein, I guess the formal answer is that any urgent requests that pose a public safety risk are made safe within 48 hours of receipt of the request, while more routine requests for repairs are packaged and tendered over the year. Typically, it can take between one and 12 months for requests to be addressed depending on the priority, the location and whether the existing paths are safe and serviceable. At any one time there are about 1,000 requests in the TAMS management system.

While this information currently resides within the TAMS management system, as Mr Wall has alluded to in his comments, it would take considerable time and effort to present it in a way that would be useful to the general public on a website. That would be a significant drain on resources. While I think the request and the intent of the motion is to make public as much information as possible—and transparency of government processes is something I advocate—it would be difficult to publish all the specifics about repairs and maintenance of our enormous path network. To be honest, I would rather focus those resources on actually improving the network and to having them repaired and improved in a reasonable time and being responsive to the public need.

Having looked into it, I think we can take some reasonable steps that will make more information available to the public. TAMS manages many repairs by packaging them and going out to tender. At any point in time, there are about 350 locations that are packaged for this purpose. My view is that this information would be more useful to the general community.

At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MR RATTENBURY: As I was saying, I think the information about the tenders would be more useful to the community as it provides greater certainty on the timing and time frames of work, as well as listing locations by street and suburb. I will therefore ask that TAMS publish this information on the TAMS website and update it as new tenders are let.

In addition, I will ask my directorate to publish information on the TAMS website that summarises the processes TAMS uses to maintain and repair the footpaths and shared paths around Canberra. I think this information is always useful to the public so they can understand the prioritisation system and also then the expectations about repairs. Hopefully that will be beneficial. I have indicated in my amendment that we will do that by 31 March. The only reason for the time frame is—we will try and do it sooner—just to give us time to distil it into a coherent document.

So for the reasons I have outlined, I will propose an amendment that will commit the government to providing some additional information to the public, and I appreciate the indication from Mr Wall that he accepts that amendment. I think it delivers the essential intent behind his motion today. Hopefully it also reflects my genuine intent to improve walking and cycling facilities in the ACT.

I get a lot of correspondence from members about these matters, and I know they get this paragraph from me all the time, but I would encourage members of the public to go directly to either Canberra Connect or fix my street. It is not that I do not want members to write me letters, but it is actually quicker and the agencies will get onto it faster if those are used mechanisms directly.

The public actually plays a really important part in getting these amenities fixed up. I do not think it would be a good use of resources to have government inspectors just wandering the streets looking for cracked paths, and I really encourage people, if there is a problem, to let the government know. I think the systems work quite well through fix my street and Canberra Connect to get them repaired in a timely manner. Of course someone will always come along and say, “Mine fell through the cracks.” Terrible pun, that one; sorry, but it was unintended. I apologise for where the system does break down, but my experience and the checking I have done in the portfolio is that a very large percentage get dealt with in a very efficient and timely manner.

I simply close by moving my amendment and commending it to the Assembly:

Omit paragraphs (1) and (2), substitute:

“notes:

- (1) there is a large number of footpaths and shared paths across the ACT—approximately 2200 km of footpaths and 350 km of cycle paths;
- (2) the ACT Government has processes in place to manage and maintain footpaths and shared paths across the ACT;

- (3) the length of time between identification of a footpath or shared path in need of attention and the actual work will be based on an assessment of the priority for repair and serviceability of the existing path and its location; and
- (4) that, to improve available public information and engagement, the ACT Government will:
 - (a) publish information about the processes it uses for managing and maintaining footpaths and shared paths on the TAMS website by 31 March 2013; and
 - (b) publish on the TAMS website a list of footpaths and shared paths included for repair on all future tenders.”.

MRS JONES (Molonglo) (6.02): I rise to speak in support of this motion, which seeks to shed a light on the state of the footpaths in the ACT. During the election campaign when out and about doorknocking I spent many hours pounding the pavement. This gave me a first-hand view of the state of maintenance of many of the footpaths all across Canberra, as well as exposing a number of suburbs that do not have any footpaths at all, particularly in Gungahlin. In Amaroo I spoke to a father who had suffered the rage of motorists when he was pushing his child in a pram along the road. With no footpaths in his suburb, what other option is there for him?

In Weston Creek some of the serious trip hazards have been “maintained” recently. The workers have been grinding the concrete to smooth it out. The method of maintenance has made walking on some these paths much like walking on the ancient cobblestones of Rome. Pushing prams is rather like completing an obstacle course under such conditions.

In Narrabundah the paths have not yet been ground; they have not been repaired. They are uneven and overgrown with shrubs and overhanging trees causing hazards. The good residents of the area deserve better. Our elderly whose only method of transport is electric wheelchairs are forced to drive on the road as the paths are in such a state of disrepair. Residents complained that they do not feel safe to walk home from the bus after work with alleyways that are rarely and inadequately maintained and certainly not properly lit.

Ms Gallagher stated on 21 February 2012 with the announcement of the lease variation charge that money from that charge would go directly towards the urban improvement fund and that this money would be used to make a noticeable difference to footpaths. This issue has a daily impact on the lives of every Canberran, and I commend Mr Rattenbury for his seeming willingness to put this issue in a more public arena.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.04): Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the importance of footpaths and cyclepaths across Canberra and what we are doing as a government to manage, maintain and expand the walking and cycling network. Canberra, as we have heard, has an extensive network of footpaths and cyclepaths. As members of this Assembly know, very few locations are in a state of disrepair.

The ACT government has directed more funding to the annual maintenance program for footpaths and cyclepaths, and this has been specifically referred to in the previous ACT Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement as well as the current agreement. \$15 million has been included in the current agreement to address walking and cycling infrastructure needs, including the maintenance and construction of new works.

Walking and cycling is important for the ACT community; it helps keep people healthy, and, with Australians ranking highly in terms of obesity, it is important that the ACT government promotes a more active and healthy form of travel. I personally use the ACT paths every morning—six to 10 kilometres every day around the suburbs of Calwell and Tuggeranong hill. I enjoy the amenity of the network and find little disrepair on that walk.

Visitors to the ACT do not talk about the state of disrepair of our footpaths and cyclepaths; they speak more in envy about the extent of paths we have across Canberra and how the planning and management of the city includes provision for walking and cycling. Canberrans, too, are very appreciative of the walking and cycling network that is in place, and while there will always be requests for more, there is a high level of satisfaction with what we currently have.

The most requests for repairs or reporting of damage to footpaths and cyclepaths are lodged through Canberra Connect, with over 4,500 inquiries having been received in the last three years. Easier access to Canberra Connect and ACT government services has been a priority and has been achieved through the fix my street online reporting. A mobile phone application is now being developed to make access to the government services even more accessible.

People like to understand the processes behind any request they lodge, and I agree that information provided by Canberra Connect and the Territory and Municipal Services Directorate website can play an important role. Confirmation that a request for service has been received and is being assessed is important, as is the ability to track the request as it works its way through the assessment process and is included in a works package.

I support the amendment put forward by Minister Rattenbury. Canberra has an extensive network of footpaths and cyclepaths and there are well established processes in place to manage and maintain those paths. It is important that urgent repairs get attention in the first instance and that the subsequent priority is based on an assessment of the condition of the existing path and its location. The community would benefit from some additional information about the timing of any works, and the information provided as part of the tender process would provide a good basis for this.

Amendment agreed to.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (6.08): In closing, I thank my colleagues for their contributions today and reiterate my reasons for moving this motion. Taxpayers in the

ACT expect more for their money; they expect that their rates and charges will go up but that services will be delivered in order to keep pace with these increases. It is not much to expect, and I intend to ensure that what I do in this place reflects that view.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for his amendment and cooperation in agreeing to provide more updates and more information to the community on this issue. The Liberal Party will be supporting the motion as amended.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Transport—light rail

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.09): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the Government's commitment to construct light rail; and
- (2) calls on the Government to table by the last sitting day in February:
 - (a) the expenditure to date, broken down by financial year, on external sources including consultancies, reports and studies;
 - (b) the internal expenditure to date, broken down by financial year, on internal sources and the number of public service staff working on the project and in what agencies;
 - (c) the timeline for the decision-making and construction progress;
 - (d) the expected cost to taxpayers of pre-construction and construction;
 - (e) the predicted patronage, running costs and staffing once operational;
 - (f) the population within reasonable walking distance of a light rail stop;
 - (g) plans for park and ride facilities;
 - (h) the financial models for funding the project; and
 - (i) what feedback was received from Infrastructure Australia as a result of the 2008-09 federally funded proposal.

Madam Speaker, I stand here today to ask serious questions about the Labor-Greens commitment to construct light rail in Canberra.

In early November last year, following the agreement signed by the Chief Minister and Shane Rattenbury, the government undertook to review light rail in the ACT. Mr Rattenbury is quoted in the *Canberra Times* on 3 November last year as saying:

Light rail will come to this city as a result of this agreement. Canberrans will see works commence during the course of this term of the assembly.

We in the opposition will be scrutinising this agreement and, in particular, from my perspective as shadow minister for transport, the commitment to construct light rail.

The thought of light rail in Canberra is not a new proposition. Of course, Walter Burley Griffin designed Canberra with wide boulevards to provide for private vehicle traffic, many with space for the provision of a bus way or tramway at a later point in time. Since those days of the early development of Canberra, light rail has been considered countless times as an alternative transport mode in the city.

Today, the cause has many passionate advocates—such as ACT Light Rail, convened by Damien Haas. It is my belief that people like the idea of light rail, but the realities of the cost of construction, patronage and running costs are still major hurdles that need to be overcome.

In the 2008 election, the Canberra Liberals undertook that if we won the election and won government we would conduct an engineering study to provide more information about the feasibility of construction. After all, it is very difficult to do a cost-benefit study if neither the costs nor the benefits are known.

I believe the government has jumped the gun by giving an absolute guarantee to Canberra to construct light rail before all the facts are known. The government has not committed to simply doing studies, research or costings. It has committed to delivering light rail in Canberra. This is a bold and courageous commitment and one I think it will struggle to honour.

The Labor Party said in media releases:

If re-elected, ACT Labor has committed to establish Canberra's first large-scale private sector partnership to plan, finance and develop the first stage of a light rail network starting from Gungahlin to the City.

The opposition have already flagged serious concerns about the cost and patronage of light rail, and we want to see evidence. If the opposition are to support the government in this endeavour, like all issues, the case has to be made.

My motion today is about this case. The government should deliver to the opposition—and, through the Assembly, all Canberrans—information about the project. I have asked for the expenditure to date on external and internal sources, the time line for the decision-making and construction process, the expected cost to taxpayers of pre-construction and construction, the predicted patronage, running costs and staffing once operational, the population within reasonable walking distance of light rail stops, the plans for park-and-ride facilities, the financial models for funding the project, and what feedback was received from Infrastructure Australia as a result of the 2008-09 federally funded proposal, which failed. These are all reasonable questions to ask and they should be able to be answered.

In the current budget, the government states:

The City to Gungahlin Transit Corridor Study is currently investigating the feasibility of replacing the existing bus service between Gungahlin and the City with a light rail transit or bus rapid transit corridor along Northbourne Avenue and Flemington Road.

So work has been done and is being done, but we have not got answers. The questions I propose in this motion I think should be able to be answered. If not, I would like a reason why not. Taxpayers deserve the information and I hope this motion will achieve this.

MR CORBELL (Molonglo—Attorney-General, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations and Minister for the Environment and Sustainable Development) (6.13): I move:

Omit paragraphs (1) and (2), substitute:

“(1) notes that the ACT Government is committed to delivering the Capital Metro project for Canberra;

(2) notes that:

- (a) construction of a light rail network will be one of the biggest and most complex capital works projects undertaken in the ACT;
- (b) the construction of a light rail network in Canberra will bring major benefits to the people of Canberra and will be a transformative project for our City;
- (c) the Capital Metro project will improve transport access and mobility for the community, especially through its integration with the broader transport network;
- (d) the Capital Metro project will deliver environmental benefits via emissions reductions through mode shift from private vehicles to public transport; and
- (e) the Capital Metro project will be a catalyst for urban renewal along the corridors and in our town centres; and

(3) notes that:

- (a) the Government is committed to a high level of transparency and will progressively release information about the Capital Metro project as it is developed;
- (b) a substantial body of work has already been undertaken to inform the progress of Capital Metro, including the Concept Design Report and strategic transport modelling and economic and financial appraisal;

- (c) the Government is committed to continuing its thorough planning and investigations including such studies as the Light Rail Integration Study, for which tenders have now been called, and the Light Rail Product Identification Study to be commenced in April this year;
- (d) the Government has released an indicative timeline through the Concept Design Report and has committed to laying the first light tracks by 2016 through the Parliamentary Agreement;
- (e) the people of Canberra will be given many opportunities to be involved in this project as it progresses, through an ongoing program of public consultation; and
- (f) the Government will continue to work to achieve a long term vision for Canberra as a sustainable city, with the Capital Metro light rail network as a vital element of that vision.”.

I am pleased to speak today on the government’s commitment to delivering a light rail system for Canberra. The government has committed to progressing a light rail network for Canberra, with construction to commence in 2016 and preliminary construction, including utility relocation, to occur from 2015.

The government’s commitment to the delivery of rapid transit links between the Gungahlin town centre and the city was first announced in the 2012-13 budget. This commitment was reaffirmed during the most recent ACT election and its priority entrenched in the parliamentary agreement for the Eighth Assembly between the ACT Labor Party and the ACT Greens.

Capital metro stage 1 will be a light rail service, with vehicles capable of carrying up to 200 people at regular frequencies along a 12-kilometre route from Hibberson Street in Gungahlin to the city centre. The proposal involves potentially major stations at Gungahlin town centre and Dickson group centre, with high-quality stops 750 metres to 1.5 kilometres apart at various points along Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue, terminating in the city.

Investment in rapid transit along the Gungahlin to city corridor, through the additional transport capacity and urban amenity benefits it would provide, has the potential to unlock a number of economic development opportunities. The light rail project will increase the transport capacity of existing corridors.

There are few viable options available to increase capacity outside of existing road corridors. During peak periods, existing bus services operating along Northbourne Avenue carry more passengers than all car passengers combined in a traffic lane. An investment in light rail will allow the carrying capacity of the corridor to be significantly increased, providing vital capacity to cater for future growth and, by using an existing corridor, optimising the use of existing infrastructure.

The light rail will promote economic productivity and stimulate economic activity through urban redevelopment. Therefore a number of opportunities are being investigated to increase residential and commercial densities along the corridor on

sites which are significantly underdeveloped. These include public housing redevelopments, the Dickson group centre and the potential redevelopment of land currently occupied by EPIC and the racecourse.

As a key landowner, and as the land manager under the leasehold system, a unique opportunity exists for the ACT government to both directly and indirectly encourage urban renewal along the corridor, and indeed at the key anchor points of Gungahlin and the city.

Providing additional transport capacity is a significant enabler of promoting further development of these sites, allowing for the better use of existing land capacity within the corridor. The light rail network will enhance the sustainability of our development patterns.

As part of the project, the government will actively support transit-oriented development. This will include a mix of activities along the corridor, with the aim of encouraging a greater level of localised trips, which are more likely to be undertaken through walking and cycling. Where intertown travel is required to connect with employment hubs, faster and more reliable public transport services, facilitated by light rail, will encourage greater use of public transport.

The project is also economically efficient. A preliminary cost-benefit analysis undertaken suggests that, despite the higher cost of delivery, rapid transit has the potential to be economically viable. The preliminary economic appraisal showed that light rail under a “business as usual” population scenario delivers a benefit-cost ratio of just over one. By prioritising residential and employment growth along the corridor and within the Gungahlin town centre and city areas, in line with the government’s planning strategy and transport for Canberra plan, the benefit-cost ratio increases to above two. That ratio represents an economically viable project, which, given the transformational capacity of light rail, is highly worthy of delivery.

The development of a light rail system will represent a significant capital investment in transport infrastructure and will implement the government’s strategies and actions identified in Transport for Canberra and the planning strategy.

However, the real value of the capital metro project is in enabling transformation of how the city develops and its capacity to encourage growth in economic activity, particularly at the anchor points in the city and Gungahlin, as well as along the corridor.

The aim of the government, as outlined in our parliamentary agreement, is to commence construction by 2016. In order to meet this deadline, work has already commenced. Feasibility projects completed up to January 2013 include concept planning and transport engineering of light rail transit alignment options, including kerbside and median alignment; evaluation of certain options; land use development scenarios; government agency stakeholder consultations; the release of project update 1, informing the public on the progress of the project; concept design reports; community consultations during April-May 2012; the release of project update 2; the facilitation of six community information sessions in Civic, Dickson and Gungahlin,

including surveys, social research, public submissions and meetings with industry and community stakeholders; the development of strategic transport modelling to support economic evaluation; economic and financial appraisal; peer review of strategic transport modelling; cost estimation of options; options evaluation; the development of a nation building 2 program for co-contribution from the commonwealth; the release of project update 3 in September last year; further refinements to light rail route alignments to achieve savings in the order of approximately \$100 million; and investigations into catenary-free and wireless light rail technology.

This highlights that there have already been a considerable number of projects undertaken on which we will continue to need to work in harmony to facilitate the broader objective of a transit outcome, particularly focusing on land planning and development, public housing provision and affordable housing.

These projects aim not only to provide significant revenue streams to government which support the broader provision of government services but also to transform the territory by stimulating its economy through private and public investment, diversification of employment and residential centres, promotion of new employment sectors, and increased wellbeing of residents.

In July last year the government submitted to Infrastructure Australia a business case in support of a request for a co-contribution matching the territory's commitment of \$15 million to fund further preliminary design works and feasibility assessments. The business case included a preliminary cost-benefit analysis focusing on the traditional and more readily monetised economic costs and benefits that could be expected to accrue. Over the coming weeks, at the invitation of the commonwealth, further revisions of the business case will occur to pick up our latest understanding of the wider economic benefits that are expected to accrue to the territory economy.

Gungahlin to city is the first part of a broader light rail network for Canberra which has the potential to ultimately link town centres and major employment areas as well as potentially servicing Queanbeyan and other parts of the broader region. The light rail network master plan will be undertaken in the next 18 months to identify suitable light rail corridors across Canberra for future expansion. These corridors will be based on the work underpinning the rapid network established in transport for Canberra. Work is also underway within the capital metro project office on a range of preliminary engineering investigations, transport planning, and economic and financing studies to guide the future development of the project.

One of the first projects since the election is the light rail integration study. Tenders to conduct that study are being evaluated and the study is expected to commence shortly. The study will investigate the integration of the light rail system into the broader public transport network and will inform the preliminary design of the project to be undertaken over the next one to two years. There will be opportunities for community input into all aspects of the project as this work proceeds.

Residential development and commercial development along the corridor are critical to support the overall economic benefits of this project. Capital metro will achieve its

broad range of policy objectives by ensuring that it is considered not just as a transport project or a land development or infrastructure project but as one that brings all elements of our metropolitan context together.

The government has commenced the investigative process of assessing the procurement and financing options for the light rail infrastructure and operations, including the issue of public-private partnerships. As part of this process, we will be approaching the marketplace once we have developed an appropriate level of preliminary design to provide sufficient information to effectively and efficiently engage with the market. We will also be undertaking detailed risk analysis to understand and manage the risk presented by the project and identify appropriate strategies for risk mitigation.

As part of this work, we have also commenced the preliminary investigation for what will become the property strategy for the corridor. The urban redevelopment of this corridor will be transformative, providing a stimulus and confidence in the market for development and growth along it and at its terminus nodes in Gungahlin and the city. The work to understand the appropriate land release sequencing—including appreciating potential yields on the corridor; demand volumes and patterns, particularly around housing preference in the corridor; and demographic trends and the establishment of population and density targets—is well underway.

We will be developing a land release model that is able to immediately react to market requirements, a land release model that is attentive to the social and environmental impacts of urban renewal but that also supports affordable housing choices.

The government are aiming high with this project. We aim to put in place a framework that will safeguard high-quality sustainable design while encouraging efficient and sustainable land use. The project is not only about government investment; it is also about understanding and engaging the role of the private sector in achieving the outcomes sought.

Given the relationship of various elements of this project to the daily work undertaken by other areas of government, there will be close coordination across all government agencies that have a stake. For example, the property strategy will have strong linkages with a number of government policies and strategies, including the planning strategy, Transport for Canberra, relevant city planning projects and broader public health objectives.

The capital metro project is a multifaceted initiative, and its scope and nature are unlike anything previously managed by any previous government. It represents a vision for our future, not only in the way by which the people of the territory get about during their daily lives but, more fundamentally, in the way we think of ourselves and our city. A public transport network incorporating modern, efficient and integrated light rail services is the hallmark of a mature and confident city. It is that maturity and confidence, reflected in greater amenity, economic activity and an enhanced sense of wellbeing, that we are determined to deliver to the Canberra community. The first stage of the project is a critical step along that path.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Molonglo) (6.25): I thank Mr Coe for raising in the Assembly the issue of light rail. This is, of course, a topic in which I and the Greens have a very strong interest, not just in the ACT but all around Australia as part of our commitment to improving public transport and building more sustainable and liveable cities. In the ACT the Greens released our light rail for Canberra policy before the 2012 election, and developing Canberra's first light rail route became a key item in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement. Going forward we have the capital metro project, the shared goal of the Labor and Greens members of this Assembly and one that springboards from various studies and investigations done on light rail over many years.

Recently I had the nostalgic experience of watching a video from 1992 which was part of the sustainable Canberra project. That video made the case for light rail in Canberra as a way of improving our public transport, addressing urban sprawl and car dependence, reducing pollution and capturing the benefits of urban villages. It is now 20 years later, yet the problems we face now are strikingly similar. Only now the imperative to act is even stronger. We need to make our city more sustainable and liveable and also make our economy more resilient to pressures such as peaking oil supplies as well as the need to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in the face of climate change.

The ACT Greens have supported light rail because we believe the ongoing benefits of this system make it the best choice, particularly over the long term as our city grows and develops. Light rail is not just about the Gungahlin corridor, although that is where a lot of Canberra's growth is occurring. In line with the parliamentary agreement, the government is set to progress a light rail master plan detailing how and when the network will extend across Canberra to places like Woden, Tuggeranong and Belconnen. In light of the time today, I am trying to shorten my comments.

There are, of course, a range of recognised benefits to light rail, such as its ability to attract more passengers than buses, its additional speed and reliability and its compatibility with renewable energy as well as things like the sparks effect and the urban shaping effects, but I will talk about those more some other time. But all of these benefits are well researched, well documented and generally accepted.

The Liberal Party in Western Australia recently announced a large light rail project for Perth of which the Greens have been vocal supporters. The Western Australian Liberal Party are proud of their project, and their transport minister described it in glowing terms as:

... a transformational investment in public transport by our Government which will give the people of Perth access to the type of public transport offerings that exist in major cities all over the world.

A point I want to emphasise is that big projects such as capital metro and the Perth light rail project need to go through long and detailed stages of development, so not all of the information that Mr Coe is asking for today is available in its final detail.

Much of it is covered in work already made public, but certainly not all. It is the same in Western Australia; the Liberal Party transport minister has not yet explained how his government will finance its light rail project. Likewise, technical and engineering details will need to be finalised. These projects, naturally, go through staging, and, just like the Canberra metro project, details are refined as the project progresses. It does not mean there is some conspiracy to secrecy or mismanagement; the intention is for all staged work to come together in a well-planned and well-implemented project.

At this stage of the capital metro project, I am satisfied that it is progressing sensibly. Just over the last year or so we have had three concept reports on the Gungahlin-city corridor, and a lot of the information requested in Mr Coe's motion is already in those reports. That said, it will certainly remain a focus of mine to ensure that this capital metro project remains transparent and that there is significant public engagement and consultation. I believe these sorts of qualities will be key to the success of the project.

On that basis, I will be supporting the amendment put forward by Mr Corbell. It recommits to a high level of transparency and ongoing public consultation as well as the release of information when it is available. Again, I believe this is the essence of Mr Coe's motion between what has already been made publicly available and a commitment to continue to make the information available. I think the spirit of what Mr Coe is seeking in his motion will be delivered, and I will be supporting Mr Corbell's amendment.

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.29): I am disappointed that both ministers will be supporting the amendment. It is disappointing they are not agreeing to take on the questions I have put forward. I understand some of the answers to questions would be estimates; I understand some of the answers would not be exact. But I still think there is an expectation in the community that the government should have a fair idea of the answers to each of the questions listed in my motion. I am disappointed. We will, of course, be voting against the amendment, but I welcome the additional information provided by Minister Corbell and Minister Rattenbury in today's debate.

Question put:

That **Mr Corbell's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 8

| | | | |
|------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Mr Barr | Ms Gallagher | Mr Coe | Mr Seselja |
| Ms Berry | Mr Gentleman | Mr Doszpot | Mr Smyth |
| Dr Bourke | Ms Porter | Mrs Dunne | Mr Wall |
| Ms Burch | Mr Rattenbury | Mr Hanson | |
| Mr Corbell | | Mrs Jones | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Question put:

That **Mr Coe's** motion, as amended, be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

| Ayes 9 | | Noes 8 | |
|------------|---------------|------------|------------|
| Mr Barr | Ms Gallagher | Mr Coe | Mr Seselja |
| Ms Berry | Mr Gentleman | Mr Doszpot | Mr Smyth |
| Dr Bourke | Ms Porter | Mrs Dunne | Mr Wall |
| Ms Burch | Mr Rattenbury | Mr Hanson | |
| Mr Corbell | | Mrs Jones | |

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Corbell**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australia Day awards

MR COE (Ginninderra) (6.36): I rise today to place on the record my congratulations to those in my electorate of Ginninderra who received honours in the 2013 Australia Day honours list. Rear Admiral James Goldrick AM, CSC, RANR was made an Officer in the Military Division of the Order of Australia for distinguished service as Commander, Border Protection Command; Commander, Joint Education and Training; Commandant of the Australian Defence Force Academy; and for outstanding scholarship in the study of Australian naval history.

Dr David Evans was made a Member of the Order of Australia for significant service to science and innovation through commercialising and developing new technologies. Mr Richard Longmore was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to herpetology, particularly the study of snakes and lizards.

Group Captain Arthur Skimin was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community, particularly veterans and their families. I know Arthur personally. I know the tremendous difference he makes to the life of veterans across Canberra but especially at Calvary hospital and I thank him for the wonderful service he does for our community.

Mr Paul Street was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the community through Rotary International. Mr Dean Turner was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to the sport of volleyball as an administrator, referee and coach. Ms Sheryl Lewin was awarded the Public Service Medal for outstanding public service to the Australian public service, especially to the welfare and social inclusion aims of government.

Commander Paul Moggach RAN was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for outstanding achievement in the performance of duty as the Commanding Officer of 817 Squadron from August 2009 until decommissioning of the squadron in December 2011. Lieutenant Colonel Jenelle Lawson was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for outstanding achievement as staff officer plans, Headquarters Defence Force Recruiting, for the innovation, development and successful implementation of the defence technical scholarship program during the period from 2007 to 2011.

Colonel John McLean was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for outstanding achievement as Commanding Officer, 16th Air Defence Regiment. And finally, Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Thomson was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for outstanding achievement as a project director, Defence Support Group—Capital Facilities and Infrastructure Branch.

I apologise if I have missed anybody in the electorate of Ginninderra, and if so, I will come back into this place and add my congratulations to them at a later point in time. Once again, I congratulate all those who have received honours. They have all shown commitment in their respective areas of service to the Canberra community and beyond, and they can take great pride in their achievements. And we as a community should take pride in the special recognition that they have received.

Australia Day awards

Aboriginal reconciliation—national apology to stolen generation Emergency services—workers

MS PORTER (Ginninderra) (6.38): I would add my congratulations along with Mr Coe's to those people that were awarded. As a member of the order, I really know how important it is to them and I will be writing to each of them at a later stage.

I would like to acknowledge the fifth anniversary of the apology. I am sorry I was unable to rise to my feet before to do this but that was my fault at that particular time earlier today. But the apology by the Prime Minister was a very significant day and as a person who has worked and lived in remote Indigenous communities in the Top End of the NT for 12 years, I well know the effect of the policies imposed on the communities at that time and since by successive governments at all levels for so many years, not only by governments, of course, but also by institutions of all kinds.

The mission I worked with for the bulk of the time in the NT, I am pleased to say, was not involved in carrying out the destructive and devastating policies of removing children. However, at the time it did perpetuate a paternalistic culture which assumed a subtle dominance over traditional cultures and a lack of tolerance. And, as I said five years ago in this place, I feel very disappointed and sorry that I was in any way part of that attitude and the way that we carried out our work at that time.

I would also like to reflect on the recent response to the weather conditions, both the hot and dry weather as well as the recent storms, and I would like to personally thank the minister and all the emergency services workers for their preparedness and their

swift response. As a member of my community fire unit in Hawker and the liaison person for the second CFU in Hawker, I am aware of the preparedness of the CFUs during that time and the support and advice available to them from the regular fires.

We were obviously in a state of readiness throughout the whole period of those extreme conditions. I am aware the Hall CFU was, in fact, activated, and I thank them for their work on the day and thank all my colleagues who are committed to their role in protecting people and property in their areas through constantly being involved in training.

Neighbourhood Watch

MR WALL (Brindabella) (6.41): I rise tonight to draw attention to the work undertaken by the dedicated volunteers involved with Neighbourhood Watch. Last week I had the pleasure of meeting with the President of the ACT Neighbourhood Watch Association, Margaret Pearson. The Neighbourhood Watch program is a community-based crime prevention program in which members of a particular neighbourhood accept that they have a personal and social responsibility to assist in the promotion of a sense of wellbeing, safety and security. The program is also aimed at reducing crime, especially property crime and crime to the person. The program is primarily directed at reducing the incidence of burglary in residential areas, but it is also aimed at reducing crime generally.

Promotion of a safe and secure environment through the Neighbourhood Watch program is the aim of the ACT Neighbourhood Watch Association. There are over 75 Neighbourhood Watch groups operating in the ACT, supported by approximately 3½ thousand members. Groups vary in size and purpose, focusing on an area as large as a suburb or as a local group of residents living in the same townhouse complex. Neighbourhood Watch communicate with their members and the wider community through printed newsletters and email updates. These are used to inform the community of crime trends, current scams and proactive tips for reducing opportune crime. Within the electorate of Brindabella there are many active Neighbourhood Watch groups in areas such as Farrer, Pearce, Bonython, Calwell and Gordon.

Canberra has the longest established Neighbourhood Watch group in Canberra, being established in 1984, while other suburbs have from time to time had active groups depending on the needs of residents. Neighbourhood Watch are always looking for new volunteers to strengthen the service that is provided to the community, and there is currently a focus to strengthen their presence in Banks, Conder and Fadden. I would like to place on the record my sincere thanks and offer my support to the many volunteers who work with Neighbourhood Watch to promote a safer and happier community for all Canberrans.

Convoy for cancer

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella) (6.43): I rise tonight to inform the Assembly about an event I took part in on 2 February—the convoy for cancer. The convoy is an awareness-raising event that also raises funds for a very important cause—the Cancer Support Group of Canberra, formerly known as the Eden-Monaro Cancer Support

Group. The convoy was a fantastic event. We began over in Mitchell, staged the convoy, and then drove all the way down the expressway to Tuggeranong where we finished up in a carnival-like atmosphere. We expected there would be around 200 trucks for the convoy and around 200 motorcycles. They were the registered participants. But on the day that figure was doubled. There were 409 trucks and some 350 motorcycles. They actually stopped counting at 350.

The government assists, of course, with cancer services across the ACT and has committed \$20 million to boost services over the next four years across the ACT. The Cancer Support Group itself is funded by the ACT government to the tune of \$117,200, GST exclusive of course, for 2012-13 by the Health Directorate. That pays the running costs of the organisation. The funds raised by the convoy actually go to online support services for those cancer sufferers. Cancer is the leading cause of disease in the ACT with one in three males and one in four females developing cancer by the age of 75. The Cancer Support Group currently provide assistance to over 600 cancer patients. They assist with extra costs as well as providing counselling and referring services.

I just want to mention some of the people that took part in the event: the patron of the convoy, Annette Ellis, our former member, the Cancer Support Group itself—Hugh Percy, the organiser, and Melissa Garner—and Scotty and Nige from 104.7. The lead truck was Boss Haulage and Excavations. They paid \$10,000 to drive their truck over there. ACTION and the ACT Ambulance Service were both attendees, as well as ActewAGL. There was the Canberra Raiders with Dave Furner. It was wonderful to see his wife, Kelly, attending to help out and also their daughter, Bella, who was dancing for the group, and the carnival atmosphere. The Elvin Group paid \$6,250. They paid another \$200 per truck, and they had 23 trucks in the convoy. There was Dale and Hitchcock, \$6,000; ATS, \$5,000; Innaimo Transport, \$3,300; the D Group, \$3,040; TJS Country Express, \$2,100; Jones Transport (Yass), \$2,000; Canberra Concrete Recyclers, \$1,000; and the Wholesale Sleeper Co, \$500. Those participants that I mentioned—the 409 trucks and 350 motorcycles—also paid a \$30 registration fee for each participant, which went to the Cancer Support Group.

I make special mention of a good friend of mine, Marty Hains, who used to be here in the ACT. He has moved to Wollongong now and operates in one of the FM stations down there. He brought a series of trucks and support from Wollongong and I would like to mention those: Murrell Freight, M.J. Rowles, JJ Richard and Sons, Matt James Haulage and Southern Truck Centre. In conclusion, it was a huge success, raising \$83,700-odd, and they are still counting, apparently. Congratulations to all of them.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

DR BOURKE (Ginninderra) (6.48): Madam Speaker, did you know that the recent trends in international maths and science study showed that the ACT topped the nation with approximately 80 per cent of our students meeting or exceeding the international benchmark in maths and science? Other Australian states did not do as well. Performance in maths and science has been linked to teachers' expertise and student engagement during lessons.

Tonight I would like to focus on one of the major national institutions in Canberra contributing to our knowledge base and careers in the fields of science and maths, the CSIRO. In the ACT there are approximately 1,900 people working at seven locations. The Black Mountain laboratories are a hub for research activities in environmental and biological sciences. Also located there is the discovery centre, a major science history attraction. Mathematics, informatics and statistic scientists are co-located with the ANU. The Canberra deep space communication complex at Tidbinbilla receives data from and transmits commands to spacecraft on deep space missions.

I am pretty keen to talk about a few of the CSIRO's education efforts to engage teachers, students and the wider community in the areas of maths and science. Their aim—our aim—is to invest in Australia's long-term future. Scientists in schools, with its subprogram mathematicians in schools, is a national program that creates and supports long-term flexible partnerships between teachers, scientists and mathematicians. In the ACT there are over 60 partnerships with primary and secondary schools.

Students benefit from meeting practising scientists and mathematicians. Teachers benefit from increased engagement with their students and an increase in their own confidence and knowledge. For scientists and mathematicians, it is an opportunity to work and communicate with students and teachers and to promote interest in their fields.

CSIRO's carbonkids program, part of the Australian sustainable schools initiative, combines the latest science with sustainability education. School communities around the nation as well as the ACT are learning to understand climate change. Carbonkids schools are encouraged to explore vegetation management and revegetation in school grounds and wetlands as an effective way of sequestering carbon and tackling climate change.

Last September I was a speaker at the national youth science forum orientation evening held at CSIRO headquarters. Canberra-based partnerships include the ACT government and CSIRO. The forum is the only program in Australia that offers high school students the chance to commence and to examine a range of universities and careers in science.

The CSIRO, in addition to being a major employer in Canberra, benefits us in many ways. Three examples are: we recently commemorated the 10th anniversary of the Canberra bushfires. The CSIRO forest systems group's research priorities and expertise include bushfire dynamics and applications. They are world leaders in bushfire behaviour research. Secondly, the endangered Camden white gum to be planted in the arboretum originated from seeds sourced from the CSIRO Australian tree seed centre in the ACT.

Thirdly, as part of our centenary celebrations, the ACT CSIRO discovery centre is putting together an exhibition, opening in March, about the tens of thousands of people who have been employed by the CSIRO since the first building was opened at Black Mountain in 1927—lots of people, lots of memories. The discovery centre

invited the community to share their memories and photos. This information and scanned images will be used to develop interactive iPhone and iPad apps featuring a map with GPS tags and noting a walking tour of the many CSIRO sites, past and present. It will be a fitting tribute to the CSIRO's historic and continuing role as one of the great national institutions. Today the CSIRO proudly continues that tradition, and its significant number of staff and research units based here are an integral and valued part of the Canberra community.

Canberra Cavalry baseball team

MS BERRY (Ginninderra) (6.52): This evening I rise to congratulate the victorious Canberra Cavalry, Canberra's very own baseball team, on winning the Australian Baseball League champion series for the first time. They have made history. The Canberra Cavalry joined an illustrious group of ACT sporting teams who have punched above their weight in national sporting competitions and triumphed. They have joined teams such as the Raiders, the Brumbies, the Capitals, Canberra United, and my old favourites, the Canberra Cannons, and we should be proud of all their achievements.

I had the opportunity in November last year to represent Minister Barr at a Cavalry match and pitch the first ball of the night, and I can say, with honesty, that even though it was fun and a little embarrassing, I am glad that the Cavalry—and I bet they are too—were not relying on my arm to win any of the games.

It has been wonderful to watch the increasing popularity of Cavalry games in Canberra, and I think much of this has to do with the family-friendly nature of the games at Narrabundah ballpark. Much like the Canberra Roller Derby League, and I know the Chief Minister is a big fan, the Cavalry have created a real following right across Canberra, and I know people travel all the way over from Belconnen to the Narrabundah ballpark, fondly referred to as the fort, to see the games.

As someone who would not have previously called themselves a fan of watching sports like baseball, I have been entertained, and I am a new and proud fan of the Cavalry. I will be going and watching them play and win future games for the Australian Baseball League and for Canberra.

I think it is a testament to all the volunteers and the management of the club that their success has occurred, and I want to congratulate the squad: the pitchers, Chris Coleman, Brian Grening, Robert Dickmann, Sean Toler, Eric Massingham, Steven Kent, Kyle Perkins, John Holdzkom, Brodie Downs, Dustin Loggins, Chris Motta, Hayden Beard, Michael Lennox, Masanori Fujihara, Chris Morgan, Bryan Herrera and Sean Guinard; the catchers, Jack Murphy, Adam Jacobs and Robbie Perkins; the outfielders, Marcus Knecht, Antonio Callaway, Ben Warner, Ryan Stovall, Jonathan Jones, Lee Mills; the infielders, Kody Hightower, Michael Wells, Jeremy Barnes, Adam Buschini, Josh Matavesi, KC Hobson and Aaron Sloan, who was the MVP of the series; and last but not least, the managers and coaches, general manager Tom Carter, manager Michael Collins, Clayton McCullough and Michael Wells.

I also pay special tribute to the Cavalry mascot, Sarge, who has his own very special version of the *Gangnam Style*, which is very popular amongst the young folk. I am sure we are all looking forward to seeing what moves he comes up with next season.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.56 pm.