



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 30 November 2021

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

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Questions without notice

Bushfires—preparation

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for emergency services. Minister, fuel reduction through prescribed burns is important for maintaining the safety of Canberrans during bushfire seasons. Yet, as you said in your recent statement on the ACT high-risk weather season preparedness and seasonal outlook, with the wetter than expected season, this has not been able to happen. Minister, what percentage of our annual target did you achieve last winter in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank the member for the question. It is an important question as we lead up to bushfire season. Of course, the season has been delayed this year, but we have seen these rains that have occurred, and grass is growing quite rapidly. Of particular concern is the western edge, if that starts to dry out.

We took a number of actions last year for fuel load reduction in both prescribed burning and also strategic slashing and grazing, as we do each year in preparedness for the season. I can advise that the BOP was done, but I will have to come back with the detail of the actual number in percentage terms.

MS LEE: Minister, which areas of the ACT have been targeted for prescribed burns this year?

MR GENTLEMAN: We manage 187,000 hectares for the ACT and the Googong foreshore. In relation to the activities most indicated, of the 2021 BOP, we have completed 94.4 per cent of the actions identified in the BOP. That is prescribed burns but also, as I mentioned, the other actions that take place. Activities for prescribed burning, physical activity and access management most impacted—about 90, 84 and 79 per cent of completion respectively.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, with the wetter season, and the inability for prescribed burns, will there be a catch-up period, and when will that commence?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, there is work that occurs right throughout the year for the ACT in ensuring that we can manage those fuel loads into the future. It is usually reliant on the weather at the time. If it is quite wet, it is difficult to do the burns; if it is windy and dangerous, it is difficult to do the burns as well. We leave that operational control within ESA and the Rural Fire Service, to manage those windows of opportunity.

Building—combustible cladding

MRS JONES: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction: in estimates you confirmed that the ACT government believes 90 buildings in private hands in the ACT are potentially affected by combustible cladding? Are you satisfied that the informal kerbside identification conducted by ACT Fire & Rescue in 2019 is an adequate assessment of the scope of the combustible cladding issue in the ACT?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank the member for the question. In response to the cladding issue that was identified, as early as 2017 the government formed an interagency building cladding reform group to determine whether or not combustible materials had been used in buildings and the ways in which those materials were posing a risk. As part of that, in December 2019 a cladding audit response team was established to look at both government buildings and also to get a sense of what was happening in relation to private buildings.

As part of that the response team undertook desktop analysis of certainly privately owned buildings, and that included a kerbside identification of buildings with cladding material that was carried out by ACT Fire & Rescue in the most likely suburbs—around town centres, transit corridors and areas where there is apartment development. The outcome of that assessment and identification was around 90 apartment buildings of three storeys or higher—

Mrs Jones: On a point of order on relevance, Madam Speaker, while the information is very interesting, my question was about whether the minister was satisfied with that methodology she is now describing in detail.

MADAM SPEAKER: In the minute or so—or half a minute—if you can come to that, Ms Vassarotti.

MS VASSAROTTI: Absolutely. This assessment looked at the areas of highest risk and we tried to identify everything. It is the case that some of that number are not expected to have cladding, and there may be some additional buildings that have the cladding. So the very short answer is yes, I am satisfied.

MRS JONES: Better late than never! Minister, if you know which buildings are affected, or at least likely affected, why have you not completed a full audit of those actual buildings, as the government has done for its own buildings?

MS VASSAROTTI: The buildings we are talking about are in private hands. They could potentially have combustible cladding, and what needs to happen is a detailed assessment of each building. In relation to the support being provided by government to those private owners, we have developed a scheme and as part of that we gone out and have contacted all the apartment owners. Significant information has been provided to strata managers as well as owner occupier organisations to support them to go through a process of assessment.

There has been a list of registered providers to support people going through that assessment, and there is a rebate scheme is provided to support up to 50 per cent of the assessment under the threshold of \$20,000. If it identified that people do have cladding, we are in the process of developing a concessional loan scheme to support private owners to deal with the issue.

MR PARTON: What do you say to owners and owners' corporations who are worried about self-reporting their combustible cladding due to concerns their insurance premiums will rise and their valuations will fall?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank the member for the supplementary question. I would say

to owners that it is really important to understand the safety risk of apartments. This issue has been identified for some time and it is important to work with strata managements and owner-occupier organisations to ensure safety risks are managed. This goes beyond cladding; there's a whole range of issues that people need to ensure are being looked after.

I encourage people to engage with the scheme in terms of the information that can be provided to determine whether or not there is an issue. It is absolutely the case that assessments will identify whether there is potentially combustible cladding and how it can be managed in particular ways. I encourage people to engage with the scheme, particularly given we are providing support for people to manage the issue.

Sustainable Household Scheme—suppliers

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Climate Action. Recent reports have revealed a large influx of operators from outside the ACT taking advantage of the Sustainable Household Scheme, with concerns raised in the community about potential quality issues from potentially alleged “rogue operators”. What standards has your government set for suppliers to protect Canberra households using the Sustainable Household Scheme?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. That reporting was entirely erroneous and had no basis in fact. The scheme has in place a very rigorous set of protections in terms of, for example, a new entrant seeking to suddenly merge into the industry. So you need to be in operation within the ACT for 12 months prior to the commencement of the scheme in order to participate. You need to be accredited with the various industry bodies, and if there is any evidence that you are not adhering to the rules of the scheme, you are kicked out immediately.

We have been auditing regularly; we have been assessing the processes; we had a pilot scheme, and the evidence is that the scheme is working particularly effectively. I can advise the Assembly that 564 installations have been completed. There are 1,575 loans approved pending installation, and 1,882 loan applications. The average loan value is \$9,700, and \$20.1 million has been approved in terms of the total loan application value. A total of 3.8 megawatts of rooftop solar power has already been installed under the scheme. It is performing very well. It is being very rigorously monitored to ensure that consumers are protected and are getting exactly what they paid for. There is zero tolerance on the supplier side for any rogue behaviour.

MR HANSON: Will your government provide a warranty to Canberrans if the installation or materials are found to be substandard under the Sustainable Household Scheme?

MR BARR: No, the consumer warranty protections sit with the product suppliers and installers.

DR PATERSON: Can you outline the benefits to the ACT community of the household scheme?

MR BARR: Thank you for the question. They are threefold. The benefits are threefold.

The scheme supports emissions reduction. It supports a reduction in household energy bills because the switch to more efficient appliances results in smaller bills for households, and it supports a sustainable program of job creation and ongoing jobs in the industry. It is not a crazy, must-begin-in-six-months homebuilder-type scheme that fuels a massive level of demand and then everything falls off a cliff. This goes on, I hope, well beyond this term of government.

Schools—end-of-year events

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, COVID-19 has been an ongoing challenge for all schools this year. How are schools celebrating the end of such a year?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. Yes, it has been a remarkable year for all schools in the ACT and around the country. I want to acknowledge the mammoth effort of parents, students and all school staff during this period. Teachers have been extraordinary this year—continuing to provide an excellent education to our children through some of the most difficult circumstances, I think we can all agree.

Everyone working in education has gone above and beyond. School admin staff have supported teaching teams and families through rapid change. BSOs and maintenance staff have kept school facilities functioning. School leaders have been steering their ships and keeping communities feeling hopeful and united.

Allied health professionals have continued to help students access learning and have supported wellbeing for our children. School cleaners, who we were really pleased to have welcomed into the public service, have done an incredible job this year in keeping our communities safe. Of course, the support staff in the Education Directorate have been liaising with health officials at all hours of the day every day, setting up pop-up testing clinics, delivering Chromebooks, developing remote education, administering additional funding and, throughout everything, keeping on delivering government policies like building new schools for our city.

After the year that we have had, it is great to see that we can come together in a COVID-safe way to celebrate, with graduations, formals and other end-of-year events.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how are schools implementing the health advice to keep these events COVID-safe?

MS BERRY: As I said, it has been great to be able to get together again in a COVID-safe way to celebrate the end of the year; but, of course, we need to maintain vigilance. The Chief Health Officer has developed COVID-safe guidelines for all of our end-of-year events. Public schools are following these guidelines very closely. The guidelines require that every event has a COVID safety plan and follows the broader community COVID requirements.

I want to acknowledge that there will be students and families who will not be able to attend these events because they have been identified as close contacts or because they have developed symptoms. I know it is heartbreaking that they will not be able to celebrate these milestones with their peers. But I am sure that they will find a way to

celebrate at home.

The Education Directorate has developed a guide to virtual end-of-year events, which also has lots of great ideas for celebrating remotely. Also, if everybody is doing the right thing, we will keep making sure that our community can remain safe.

MR HANSON: Minister, is it true that teachers are being exploited by this government, as the AEU assert in their recent teacher survey report?

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, I seek your advice on whether that question is relevant and in line with the questions that have been asked. Of course, I have mentioned teachers, but it is a bit vague.

Mr Hanson: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance—

MADAM SPEAKER: The question was around COVID safety in graduation.

Mr Hanson: The minister, in her answer—but this is not just about the question; it also goes to relevance in her answer—talked about teachers, the work that teachers have been doing and the hard work that all of the staff have been doing. I think my question, which goes to the exploitation of teachers, goes to that point.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, sit down. I call the minister, on the topic of teachers and their activity during the course of the year.

Mr Hanson: The last supp that I'm getting!

MS BERRY: We will do our best, Mr Hanson. What I can say is that the Australian Education Union have done an excellent job in representing their members and advocating for their members' health and wellbeing and industrial relations rights, with respect to their advocacy to the government. The ACT government works very closely and listens very carefully to the—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on relevance, the question was not whether the AEU—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, resume your seat. I am very aware of what your question was. It only scraped into being in order. The minister is talking about the union and the support provided to teachers—

Mr Hanson: But, Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Take your seat. Do you have anything to add, Ms Berry?

MS BERRY: No, I think I will leave it there, Madam Speaker.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, your commentary is only useful to yourself.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, can I draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Mr Richard Mulcahy, a former member. Welcome back to question time. I do wonder why you are here in question time, but you would understand and appreciate that the standing orders do not allow a question from the floor of the gallery, so you will need to contain yourself, Mr Mulcahy.

Questions without notice

Graffiti—removal

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Transport Canberra and City Services. A number of constituents have reached out to me regarding graffiti on public and private property in Tuggeranong. Specifically I have heard concerns that it is difficult to have graffiti removed from private fences that face on to public areas. Can you please outline TCCS's responsibilities for graffiti removal in these circumstances?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Davis for his question. We take the issue of illegal graffiti very seriously. We have a graffiti management strategy in place to help reduce the incidences of graffiti vandalism in the territory. The five key elements include prevention through anti-graffiti paint coatings; rapid removal; diversion through 30 legal graffiti sites across the city—and this place is well attuned to where those are now!—community awareness and education; and also through legislation.

Importantly, under the Common Boundaries Act 1981 it is the responsibility of leaseholders to remove graffiti from their private property, and that includes fences even where the graffiti face public land.

MR DAVIS: Minister, what are the barriers to the government implementing a policy that would see them take graffiti off privately owned fences that face public land?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his supplementary. We will continue to work together with private leaseholders to tackle the broad issue of graffiti vandalism across the territory in the ways I have outlined under our graffiti strategy. There are a range of things residents and householders can do to address graffiti. That includes painting over it; planting trees together with Transport Canberra and City Services, if appropriate, to create a barrier so the graffiti cannot be seen or does not happen in the first place; spraying with high-pressure hoses; using solvents that can be purchased from local hardware stores to remove graffiti; and a range of other methods.

TCCS is always happy to assist, and information is on the website if people need further information. But we will continue working together on public assets and with private leaseholders on their own properties to address this issue across the territory.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, can you provide a rough estimate of the average cost of removing graffiti from a private fence?

MR STEEL: That really depends on the vandalism in question. If there is a particular piece Mr Braddock has in mind I am happy to come back to him., but it depends depend on what type of paint has been used and what measures need to be taken to prevent it

occurring. We try to take a preventative approach to this issue. It is, of course, the leaseholder's responsibility to finance that, although we have been working collaboratively on prevention programs, particularly through the establishment of murals both on public and private property, which means that vandals are less likely to undertake graffiti on those surfaces. We are always open to a proactive, collaborative approach, but it is the responsibility of leaseholders to undertake this type of work on their own assets.

Housing ACT—repairs

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the Housing website and total facilities management contract state that repairs must be completed within 20 days of a request being received. Responding to a question on notice about repairs, you said that providers must meet Housing ACT's obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, which states:

... the lessor must make repairs, other than urgent repairs, within 4 weeks of being notified ...

The Housing ACT tenancy agreement has the same four-week time line following notification. Why, then, Minister, did you respond to a question on 24 June stating that the repair time line is triggered only once an assessment of that request has been done?

MS BERRY: I can provide some information about that. Of course, when a notification is made to the total facilities management operator they need to go out and assess the repair work. If the repair work needed is more than has been identified in the original request, the time frame will shift.

The initial response is that the repair work will happen within that period, but after an assessment is made, it could be the case—and it depends on individual circumstances—that there are more issues that are identified when the total facilities manager turns up to a person's home and does an assessment. That is the reason why sometimes it takes a bit longer for repairs to occur—sometimes those repairs require more work and take longer to get resolved.

MR PARTON: Minister what is the time frame generally from when requests are received to when they are assessed, given that some tenants are waiting several months?

MS BERRY: I think that has been identified in the answer to Mr Parton's first question. It does depend on each individual circumstance and the types of repairs that are required.

MR CAIN: Minister, why is there such a time lag between an assessment being done and the repair work being approved and then completed?

MS BERRY: I can help Mr Cain and Mr Parton to understand. In some circumstances it might be that there just is not a time that is suitable for both the public housing tenant and the total facilities management team for people to go in and do the assessment of the repairs. Again, it depends on the types of repairs that are required: whether they are significant or whether they are something that is relatively easy, that can be repaired in

a shorter period. If it is a significant repair of something in a tenant's home, it is going to take longer than 20 days. For example, if it is a kitchen upgrade or the painting of a whole house, there is a whole lot of planning work that needs to go into place.

If Mr Cain knows somebody who has made representations to him about repair work, if he could get in touch with my office or encourage that person to get in touch with total facilities management in the first place to make sure that they can have their repairs assessed and that work can get started as soon as there is a suitable time for both the tenant and the total facilities management team to get in and do that work.

Building—licensing of trades

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for building quality. Building quality is and has been an ongoing problem for many Canberrans over many years. In New South Wales carpenters must be licensed. Must carpenters be licensed in the ACT and, if not, why not?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank the member for the question. Licensing is a significant issue we have been looking at in the ACT as well as working with colleagues in building ministers' meetings for some time. It was really good to have a significant piece of work undertaken, the report *Building Confidence*, which looked at building quality issues more generally, and licensing and registration were key issues in relation to that.

In terms of the national work that has been happening, we have been working with the ABC board in order to develop a framework for registration of a range of professions. In the ACT, builders are required to be licensed, and we are looking at a range of other registrations, particularly engineer registration as a priority project that we need to be working through. We are looking at sub-trades licensing as part of that process, and we are through that program in consultation with industry right now.

Mrs Jones: Carpenters?

MS VASSAROTTI: My understanding is that if they are builders they will be licensed, and there will be some sub-licensing. But I will take the specifics of what level of licensing carpenters are covered by on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, are there any other trades the ACT does not require a licence to operate but that New South Wales do?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank the member for the question. There are differences in the licensing requirements across states and territories. That is a key element being looked at through the registration framework we are looking at nationally. Work is also happening around automatic mutual recognition and ensuring consistency across jurisdictions.

Mrs Jones: For which trades.

MS VASSAROTTI: There are a range of trades. A range of trades have different requirements, and I will take the detail on notice and provide that to the member because it is quite detailed.

MR PARTON: Minister, to what extent has this government's licensing regime contributed to the building quality crisis in the ACT?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank the member for the question, but I question using the language of "a building crisis". There are certainly a range of building quality issues that this jurisdiction is working through—as well as all jurisdictions across Australia. There has been a significant reform process we have been working through over a number of years. The first phase of reforms was reported on last year, and we continue to work on issues as we move forward.

We have identified priority projects in terms of this next phase of reform. We have been working on the registration of particular professions—engineering is the one I have identified as a priority project. We have been working with industry. I was part of a roundtable working with industry on the details of that scheme only a couple of weeks ago. There are a range of reform projects that we are working on. Licensing is part of that issue and we will continue to work with industry to get consistency across different jurisdictions. It is an issue that needs work, but certainly I really question the use of the language of "crisis".

Planning—western edge

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, there is a lot of high-value, really special ecological land on the western edge of Canberra. That region is likely to contain many endangered and vulnerable species. The ACT government has announced a western edge investigation. When will the scoping and land suitability investigations be complete?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank the member for her question. Yes, there is quite a bit of work that is occurring on the western edge to make sure that we can provide some opportunity for residential construction into the future. We have identified some areas on the western edge for investigation, for example. This will take quite a number of years. There is some funding in this budget, of course—which the Canberra Liberals just voted against!—to do that study. I thought I would get in early with that! It was almost \$700,000; I want to put that figure in the *Hansard*.

Each work that goes ahead for those studied identifies the key important areas that Ms Clay was talking about. We want to make sure that we can protect those ecological sustainable habitats into the future, and, of course, any habitat that is endangered as well. So it will take many years.

MS CLAY: Will the results of those investigations be made public so that they can be included in public consultations about western edge development?

MR GENTLEMAN: Yes, we will make those public. Of course, it is important and I think Canberrans really want to know what is of value in the western edge. So if we find something that needs protecting, we will protect it into the future. I do not want to pre-empt any findings that might come out of those studies. As I mentioned, it will take a couple of years to have those complete. These sorts of pre-development studies take a long time. I think this was initiated back when Mr Barr was the minister for

planning—so, quite a number of years ago. It is important that we do the studies to ensure that we can get the appropriate work done for the future.

MR DAVIS: Minister, how exactly will those studies be conducted to ensure that we get genuine assessment of all species and habitat in that area?

MR GENTLEMAN: We have experts from EPSDD in our environmental area to do those studies. On occasion, they will contract other experts to do some of the field work, as well. You see the results of the previous work in other areas across the ACT, particularly those habitat areas that we have been put aside for endangered habitat and for the opportunity for Canberrans to go out and have a look at those habitats.

There is some of grasslands work that Ms Orr has done. The work on Franklin grasslands, for example, is a good piece to show the sort of work that is done on the ground, looking at particular species and then putting that into policy work for the future.

Budget—children and young people

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Families and Community Services. Minister, how will the ACT budget improve support for children, young people and their families?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the question. The ACT government is, of course, committed to reducing the number of children entering statutory care, and to continuous improvement in the child and youth protection and out-of-home care systems.

The 2021-22 budget provides funding to advance a number of key projects. As I mentioned during the budget debate, one of the projects that I am personally very proud and pleased to have delivered funding for is the Safe and Connected Youth coordinated service response program. Safe and Connected Youth started as a pilot program, developed and delivered alongside community sector partners. Following the success of this pilot, the budget provides \$7 million over four years to deliver therapeutic respite accommodation, early preservation outreach services, including mediation and casework, and post-exit outreach.

This funding delivers a Labor election commitment by continuing and expanding the Safe and Connected Youth Program to include therapeutic respite accommodation, creating a coordinated service response for children, young people and their families. The redevelopment of a Housing ACT property for this purpose was funded through the 2020-21 fast-track program, with the redevelopment of the property co-designed with young people who have a lived experience of homelessness. The property refurbishment is due to be completed in late December, although it may have been somewhat delayed by the inclement weather recently. Internal fit-out of the property with soft furnishings and appliances will commence in early 2022, and the property will be ready for its intended function in the first half of 2022.

The tender for the new and expanded service was released to the market on 5 November, closing on 16 December. The existing service partners will continue to deliver the current program while the procurement process is underway. Both the refurbished

property and the service have been co-designed with young people with a lived experience of family conflict and homelessness, and the services that know them best.

MS ORR: Minister, how will the funding to modernise the Children and Young People Act support the ACT government's reform agenda?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The ACT government has an ambitious social policy reform agenda, which I know Ms Orr is very interested in. This includes a strong focus on ensuring that we create the conditions in which children, young people and families can thrive.

The 2021-22 budget includes almost \$2 million over three years to modernise the Children and Young People Act 2008. The CYP Act has been amended frequently since it was first introduced in 2008. This has led to a necessarily complex act being even less accessible for those who interact with it. The full revision of the act will improve its function, while enabling and supporting a number of key government commitments, including embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle, improving the extended care system for 18- to 21-year-olds, establishing a charter of rights for parents and families and embedding this in legislation, creating a legislated external decision review mechanism for decisions made by Child and Youth Protection Services, and implementing system reform to support raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

Modernising the Children and Young People Act will enable reforms under development to be incorporated into the CYP Act holistically, while making the act as a whole more transparent and easier for both frontline workers and the public to understand.

Importantly, the redesign of the CYP Act will focus on embedding trust and accountability in the child protection and youth justice systems. Evidence is constantly evolving about the best ways to support children, young people and families at risk. This means both policy and practice must evolve. This significant investment will support innovative best-practice child protection work and out of home care delivery.

Modernising the Children and Young People Act will enable legislation to reflect the way our modern child protection and youth justice systems work, and support our significant reform agenda.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how will this work enable the government to embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families is a black mark on Australian history, and it is incumbent upon all child protection systems to ensure that we do not repeat the past practices which have caused such deep harm to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle provides a framework for a holistic, best-practice response to families in contact with the child protection system. It emphasises the central role of self-determination in supporting and

maintaining connections.

The 1997 *Bringing them home* report described the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle as the single most significant change affecting welfare practice since the 1970s. Recommendation 5 of the Our Booris, Our Way review calls on the government to ensure that the full intent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle is reflected in the Children and Young People Act.

In the lead-up to the 2020 election, ACT Labor committed to fully implementing the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations. Funding the modernisation of the Children and Young People Act is another step towards delivering this commitment. A request for quotation was issued on 12 August for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultant to undertake consultation about embedding the placement principle into the CYP Act. The Community Services Directorate is currently finalising contract negotiations with the successful provider, and the consultation will be conducted in the first half of 2022.

The consultancy will provide advice to government on the community consensus views of how to support this change in legislation, which will continue to drive improvements in policy and practice. This builds on the work already done to develop a new practice guide to embed the placement principle in practice and the engagement of SNAICC, the national peak body, to train frontline child protection workers and build the directorate's knowledge and understanding of the context, history and the reasons that the placement principle is so important.

University of Canberra—commercial development

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Chief Minister: what oversight and approval over commercial development at the University of Canberra does your government have, and how does it differ to development on other land in the ACT?

MR BARR: The university has a different lease arrangement that pre-dates self-government. The territory parliament in 2015, from memory, passed an amendment to the University of Canberra Act to enable a wider range of uses for the university's land assets. Development on the university campus must be consistent with the National Capital Plan and the Territory Plan and with the lease the university has.

This parliament did enable a broader range of uses with the deliberate intent of enabling the university to undertake the sort of commercial development I understand the member would be referring to in this question. So it was enabled by legislation in this parliament. But like all planning matters in the ACT, it must be consistent with the National Capital Plan, the Territory Plan, the individual lease that the university has and, of course, with the intent of the enabling legislation of the territory's university, the University of Canberra.

MRS KIKKERT: Chief Minister, have any lobbyists representing UC met with your office, including with representatives of UC, since you have been Chief Minister regarding any commercial development at UC?

MR BARR: Yes, the university through its vice-chancellor, chancellor and, indeed, others met with all sides of politics in this place, as I understand it, in relation to the university's master plan and its desire to undertake a more diverse range of activities. Those meetings were all appropriately declared and the enabling legislation was brought before this place and debated. I understand—I cannot be certain—but I believe that the former Leader of the Opposition met with the University of Canberra. I know the Canberra Liberals formed a view that they did not support the legislation, but it did pass this place with the support of the majority of members.

Its intent was to allow the university to not only attract commercial investment on to the campus but also, as has been evidenced by their recent announcements, to utilise some of their land for accommodation purposes. The ACT government seeks to work in partnership with the territory's only university that is under the remit of this place in order to grow its education offerings and its engagement with the community. That is evidenced by, amongst other things, the presence of a major public health facility—the University of Canberra Public Hospital—on the campus and the election commitment the government made to bring a new elective surgery centre on the north side to the campus as well.

We want to see the University of Canberra flourish and we will undertake activities in partnership with the university to achieve that end—to deliver for this community the skills that our community needs and the services our community needs. *(Time expired.)*

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, did the recent review of the University of Canberra Act improve the transparency of commercial development at UC?

MR BARR: I believe so. The act is regularly reviewed; this is all very transparent. If it was not transparent you would not be asking questions about it and we would not have brought legislation to the Assembly to enable it. It should not come as a surprise to those opposite what is happening on the campus. It is part of a deliberate strategy to diversify the range of activities on the campus, to support new educational offerings and to deliver services to the broader Canberra community in partnership with the university.

In an environment where federal government support for Australian universities has been nothing short of atrocious, particularly during the pandemic when they were deliberately excluded from federal government support this attack on the universities from those opposite is a little bit much, particularly given the university sector is the ACT's largest export earner and the next largest employer outside of the public service.

So yes, we want the universities to grow. We want them to play an even greater role in our economy and our community, and Canberra is a better city because of the presence of so many world-class higher education institutions.

Government—ethical investments policy

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, I welcome the update to the responsible investment policy. I just have a question as to why this policy allows for some companies to have up to 10 per cent of their profits in some sectors but not others.

MR BARR: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. I believe that he is referring to the current requirements around divestment from certain industry types. Where it relates to gambling operations, yes, the threshold is currently set at 10 per cent of a company's overall activities. Gambling operations would mean that a company would either own or operate gambling facilities as diverse as casinos, racetracks, bingo parlours and other betting establishments—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR BARR: Including horses or greyhounds, Mr Parton, or other racing events that would permit wagering—and lottery operations and online gambling. And bingo, Madam Speaker. If you operate a bingo parlour, Mr Parton, that would be counted under this as well as wagering on sporting events.

The short answer to your question, Mr Braddock, is that there are many businesses that have a broad range of activities that perhaps would not be described, even from a Greens' perspective, as being at the most pernicious end of the gambling industry! Unless you are saying that we must divest ourselves of any company that has bingo operations, I think the policy setting is about right. We review this frequently. We are happy to have a look at the broad policy settings from time to time. In light of the interest in this matter, I will undertake to do so as part of the next review of our investment policies.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you, Treasurer, for that clarification. Does the ACT government invest in companies associated with nuclear weapons?

MR BARR: I think nuclear weapons are screened out under the requirement that relates to controversial weapons. This would include cluster munitions; landmines; biological and chemical weapons; and depleted uranium weapons, which I think would cover the weapon type that Mr Braddock is referring to. But it also extends to blinding laser weapons, incendiary weapons and/or non-detectable fragments. We do seek to screen our investments out there, together with gambling and also the manufacture of tobacco and related products—and direct exposure to proven fossil fuel reserves.

We cover this in great detail in estimates each year. It is part of the estimates hearing that we all look forward to!

MS CLAY: Does the ACT government support investment in companies associated with nuclear-related industries?

MR BARR: Thank you for the question. Nuclear related? I think it would depend on how it is defined. In the context of weapons, no. Perhaps in the context of medical research and the like, I think that might be a different story.

Mr Hanson: Do you support the acquisition of the submarines?

MR BARR: I do not think there is much need for a submarine fleet. There is not much need for a submarine fleet in Lake Burley Griffin, Mr Hanson.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, Mr Barr. There is a point of order.

Mr Davis: Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister only has two minutes to answer Ms Clay's question. If Mr Hanson wants to take up an interjection in his own question—

MADAM SPEAKER: Yes. I remind members not to interject and perhaps members not to respond to interjections.

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, I feel that I can absolutely and categorically rule out any nuclear submarines operating within any of Canberra's lakes.

Mr Hanson: Are you sure?

MR BARR: Yes; thank you, Mr Hanson.

In relation to the question, I would need from the member a better—perhaps tighter—definition of what “nuclear related” means. Clearly, there would be some elements within that industry sector that would not be related to either energy or weapons that may in fact be, indeed, a highly suitable area for investment.

University of Canberra—commercial development

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Chief Minister: the Riotact reported on 23 November about the sale of land by UC for \$69 million. This land will be redeveloped and include up to 2,600 residential dwellings. The article notes that the deal is subject to your government granting a Crown lease. Chief Minister, will your government grant that Crown lease?

MR BARR: I think that would be asking for a government policy announcement. Clearly, we have passed enabling legislation to enable this to happen. So, subject to the appropriate planning oversight, it would seem illogical for this parliament to have established such a framework and put in place that the clear government policy to support the diversification of land uses and activities on the university campus—so it would seem logical, without pre-empting a final decision, that that would be the direction we would be heading in.

MS LAWDER: Chief Minister, have you or anyone in your office met with any individuals other than direct staff of the University of Canberra regarding this land sale and, if so, who?

MR BARR: I do not believe so, other than representatives of the university.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, do you agree that these additional high density dwellings in the Canberra apartment market highlight the contrasting restrictions you are putting on the supply of land for other types of dwelling?

MR BARR: No, Madam Speaker. Mr Cain, you draw a few long bows in some of your questions, but that one I think sets a new world record and certainly a new record for Mr Cain in question time.

Mrs Jones: I have the longest one in history! He's joining greatness, Mr Barr.

MR BARR: He has, indeed, set a personal best! It's his personal best. That would be, for opposition backbenchers from the electorate of Ginninderra, a world record!

Heritage—National Parks huts

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the environment and heritage minister. The heritage-listed Demanding hut and Max and Bert Oldfields hut were destroyed at Namadgi National Park during the 2019-20 summer bushfires. There have been media reports that your government will not rebuild the huts, while, across the border, the New South Wales government is rebuilding almost all of its damaged huts following its own assessment. The media has also reported that your government commissioned a report into the issue, which it refuses to release. Minister why won't you release the secret report into these historic huts?

MR GENTLEMAN: As Minister for Planning and Land Management, and as the minister with responsibility for parks, I will take that question. These huts sit on Namadgi National Park land, as you hear in the question. We certainly have had a look at whether we can rebuild the huts or whether we may have to leave those remnants in place as a heritage item, and build some replication alongside them or in the general vicinity of those original huts. So conversations have been had with the National Parks Association and the directorate on the way forward for the huts.

Ms Castley: I have a point of order. The question was: why won't the minister release the report into the historic huts?

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the Minister has concluded his answer.

MS CASTLEY: I have a supplementary question. Minister, will you release the report today, given the public interest in the issue, the historic importance of these huts and their heritage value?

MR GENTLEMAN: Consultation is ongoing with the huts association and heritage experts on the huts. Those reports that I discussed have not been finalised. I cannot see any reason why we would not release them in the future, but at the moment they are quite organic.

MS LAWDER: I have a supplementary question. Minister, how is it that two jurisdictions can both make expert assessments and come up with two completely different conclusions?

MR GENTLEMAN: It is the different studies on heritage application of the huts—where that has occurred—and the construction of the huts. The National Parks Association and the huts association have different views on how we should proceed with the heritage application of the huts themselves. As I mentioned, it is a matter of whether we keep the original huts that have been burnt, in their location and monument those, if you like, or whether we build something alongside them, to reflect the important story of those huts.

Government—land purchase

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the ACT government now has the power to purchase land in New South Wales to facilitate cross-border developments, such as, for example, Ginninderry and, arguably, elsewhere. When will you tell the community about the governance arrangements for developments in New South Wales? For example, are you planning to deliver services and levy rates? If not, who will?

MS BERRY: Mr Cain may or may not be aware that development in New South Wales, as part of the Ginninderry development, will be some years into the future. The government's position has been well broadcast; our preference is for the borders to be moved, so that those parts of New South Wales become part of the ACT. That would make things a lot easier for everybody to navigate. Those conversations about that proposal from the ACT government are continuing with New South Wales, Yass council and the federal government.

In the meantime we are also looking at a plan B: should it be the case that we cannot get to that optimal point of moving the border, what are the proposals around land management, services et cetera? As I said the proposed development in Ginninderry land in the New South Wales part of that development is 10 years down the track, so there is a significant amount of time for that planning work to occur, and it has been occurring for some time now.

MR CAIN: Minister, is there a conflict of interest with your Ginninderry joint venture partner owning the land in New South Wales that the government will likely purchase to complete the Ginninderry estate?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Cain for his interest in this really great development, Ginninderry, in the western suburbs of the ACT. It is a project in which the ACT government is a joint partner, absolutely. We have been incredibly diligent in ensuring that there has been due diligence and transparency around the processes that have been in place for a number of years on the land in New South Wales, as part of the proposed Ginninderry development. All of that transparency in governance is well documented and is available for the public to analyse. I am happy to provide Mr Cain with a briefing on the processes that were conducted in ensuring that there was due diligence, transparency and appropriate governance around that process.

MR PARTON: Minister, for future developments like Ginninderry, will you commit to a “no conflicts” approach, where the government would not engage a joint venture development partner that owns the land to be sold to government for development?

MS BERRY: I do not even understand what the question means. I do not know that I could even answer about something that might or might not occur in the future. I also do not agree with the premise that the question implies, in any case.

COVID-19 pandemic—multicultural communities

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. How is the ACT government supporting multicultural communities with the COVID-19

recovery?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question and his interest and general support of the multicultural communities, including in his electorate of Yerrabi. The ACT government is supporting multicultural communities through the current COVID recovery with a range of initiatives. Earlier today applications closed for the multicultural participation grants program designed to support community organisations to promote participation and cohesion, cultural diversity and social inclusion.

In the previous year's round of grants we funded 49 organisations to deliver programs and events ranging from Diwali celebrations to financial literacy workshops. I look forward to updating the Assembly with this round's successful recipients and their COVID recovery efforts in the coming months.

Following the postponement of the 25th anniversary of the National Multicultural Festival the additional \$400,000 which was allocated to the festival in this year's budget will be used to support the participation of multicultural organisations in large community events such as Australia Day and especially Canberra Day presented by Events ACT. This does not replace the festival but, rather, recognises the importance of our local events representing and celebrating the diversity of our community.

In addition, I am pleased to share that the 25th anniversary festival grant funding totalling over \$177,000, which is bigger than previous years, will be offered to eligible community organisation applicants to assist them to participate in local events or to host their own fundraising activities. The ACT government is committed to fostering a community where everyone feels welcomed and has a strong sense of belonging.

Alongside our current work to develop and introduce a multicultural recognition act, which will now be next year, we are progressing our accreditation as a welcoming city. We are now proudly the fourth location in Australia to reach the established level of accreditation, and we are well-positioned to progress to the advanced level of the Welcoming Cities standard with that work already underway. *(Time expired.)*

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how will Events ACT engage with multicultural communities to support their participation in community events in 2022?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Just last Friday I met with the National Multicultural Festival Community Panel Reference Group and senior representatives from the National Multicultural Festival team and Events ACT to discuss the opportunities for integrating multicultural community programming at upcoming events in 2022.

The community panel reference group continues to play a key role in assisting the Community Services Directorate and Events ACT in encouraging the participation of Canberra's multicultural communities in a range of opportunities in 2022. This includes a major focus on multicultural integration at next year's Canberra Day celebrations with potential opportunities also spanning across the ancillary events, including Symphony in the Park, the Canberra Balloon Spectacular, the Enlighten illuminations and, of course, Canberra Day itself.

These opportunities will provide a platform for communities to share and showcase their cultural heritage and traditions, joining with Canberrans to celebrate multiculturalism in all its forms. Importantly, these will be revenue-raising opportunities for multicultural groups and organisations, some of whom participate in the National Multicultural Festival to raise funds to support further activities throughout the year.

The panel's advice and feedback on engaging the communities will be considered and incorporated into an expression of interest process, which is currently being developed. Interested parties can register now to receive updates about this process through the festival website.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how does the welcoming cities work benefit ACT multicultural communities?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Dr Paterson for the question and her interest. Welcoming Cities is a national network of cities, shires, towns and municipalities committed to an Australia where everyone can belong, contribute and thrive. Welcoming Cities is a founding partner of Welcoming International, which represents a growing network of more than 200 municipalities across the world.

Assessment and accreditation as a welcoming city allows jurisdictions to benchmark their progress and identify gaps in our welcoming and inclusion practices, and it provides valuable access to a community of like-minded governments setting the national standard for inclusivity both in policy and in practice.

The Welcoming Cities standard is a peer-reviewed resource that establishes the cultural diversity and inclusion benchmarks and framework for the ACT government to establish a positive and welcoming reputation, to increase the impact of government initiatives for ACT communities, and to assess progress and improvement over time.

Upon becoming an established earlier this year, the Welcoming Australia CEO, Aleem Ali, congratulated the ACT and remarked that Canberra has demonstrated what can be achieved by being welcoming and developing strong partnerships with diverse communities. He said leadership is the primary focus of the established level of the Welcoming Cities standard and that successful accreditation confirms that the ACT government is a leader amongst their peers both in Australia and internationally. I look forward to updating the Assembly as we progress work towards attaining the advanced level of accreditation.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Madam Speaker.