



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Inquiry into Climate change and a just transition](#))

**Members:**

**DR M PATERSON (Chair)  
MS J CLAY (Deputy Chair)  
MR E COCKS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**TUESDAY, 30 APRIL 2024**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr J Bunce (Ph: 620 50199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

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

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.42 am.**

**COPLAND, DR SIMON**, Executive Director, Pedal Power ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity for its inquiry into climate change and a just transition. The committee will today hear from a range of witnesses, and first from Pedal Power ACT.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today or listening online.

The proceedings today are being recorded, transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful to say, “I will take that as a question on notice.”

For our first session this morning we welcome Dr Copland, Executive Director of Pedal Power. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

**Dr Copland:** Yes. I understand the implications and agree to comply.

**THE CHAIR:** Fantastic.

**MS CLAY:** Thanks for coming in, Dr Copland.

**Dr Copland:** Thank you.

**MS CLAY:** There was a lot in your submission. I will probably hit on the things that leapt out at me and then invite you to tell us what you would like to about those, because we do not have much time and I want you to direct us to where you think we should be going. I was struck by you talking about Canberra being the most car-dependent of the world’s medium-sized metropolitan areas.

You have run through the costs of cars in Canberra. You have run through some really interesting figures on government spending—\$130 million on road widening and duplication in the last five years, which is quite a chunk. You have also had a bit of a chat about the Active Travel Plan, which does not have targets, an implementation plan or funding, and the fact that we do not support e-bikes, which could be transformative.

Can you take us to whichever of those issues you think is most relevant in the short time that we have?

**Dr Copland:** Yes. For this particular inquiry, looking at a just transition kind of change, we know that transport now accounts for the vast majority of Canberra's climate emissions, carbon emissions. I think now we are getting close to that being 70 per cent. We have been using the 60 per cent measure. I think it is getting closer to 70 per cent of our emissions now.

We need to be thinking about how we can address those emissions and how we can do so in a just way. We at Pedal Power believe that, at the moment, there is a skew in government funding towards the continued support and subsidisation of one type of transport mode, the car-based transport mode, and that we need to be shifting some of our funding away from that. That is just in a couple of ways.

First of all, not everybody can afford new cars—particularly new electric vehicles, which are one method of addressing climate change. They are still quite expensive, so, even with subsidies, they are still the purview of people who are quite wealthy. A lot of people cannot get to that, cannot achieve that, and it is unlikely they will be able to do so for many, many years. A lot of those people are living in areas where they still do not have good access to public transport, where there is not good cycling infrastructure, active travel infrastructure, and so they become reliant on dirty old cars to get around. We need to see a greater investment in these other forms that are cheaper, that are easier for people to use, but that at the moment people do not have genuine access to.

**MS CLAY:** You are observing that we are spending more government funding on more expensive things like EVs, but we are not funding cheaper things like electric bikes, and we are spending more funding on expensive things like road duplications, but we are not funding cheaper things like separated cycle lanes and footpaths?

**Dr Copland:** Yes; exactly. For a really good example of this, we can look at the duplication of William Hovell Drive, which has now ballooned out over \$100 million. It is actually one lane on one road, and that is quite a lot of money that is being spent on that one lane on that one road. That one lane on that one road is more than all of the spending on active travel that the government has announced over the forward estimates, which is about \$90 million.

We think that there is real capacity to shift some of our funding to modes of transport that can reduce emissions but can do so in a just way by giving people cheap, easy access to public forms of transport. Whether it is through active travel or through public transport, those are more just means. At the moment, we believe that we are still talking about this future. We are in the stage where we are talking about this future, but a lot of our spending and our practices are still focused on an old mode of transport.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MR COCKS:** I am quite interested in not just the major routes of transport that we have around Canberra but the fact that, for a lot of people, active travel is most feasible when it is most local. I am interested in your comments around cyclepaths in particular and that local infrastructure. You have suggested here a new strategic asset

renewal program. What is the experience around those cyclepaths? Are they degraded or in good condition?

**Dr Copland:** We have two issues. Thank you for the question. I agree with you—and the evidence really stacks up—that people are most likely to ride or walk for trips that are under five kilometres. That can expand out to about 10 kilometres when you bring e-bikes into the picture. People are willing to go further with e-bikes, and it gets up to about 10 kilometres. For perspective, I live in Harrison, on Flemington Road, and to get into the city it is about 10 kilometres. That is what that looks like.

What we get a lot of feedback on is that a lot of people feel that the infrastructure for those local trips is often not good enough and it stops them from taking those trips. Actually, one of the biggest areas where we get that feedback is around trips to school. A lot of parents feel very uncomfortable letting their kids ride to school because they are required to ride on roads, are required to ride on degraded footpaths, and just do not have the infrastructure there.

I rode to school when I was growing up. It was a much quieter city at the time, so there were far fewer cars on the road. Now people are feeling that the infrastructure has not improved, that a lot of that footpath infrastructure is the same as it was when I was riding to school 20 years ago. It has not caught up, but the traffic has increased significantly, so you have this double whammy of degrading infrastructure and increased traffic.

A really good example of this is that we have done work with the folks in Ginninderry. Ginninderry, because it is new, has amazing cycling infrastructure, but you hit the edge of Ginninderry and it completely stops. They speak about their students who go to Kingsford Smith High, for example. They want to ride there, but they get into those western Belconnen suburbs and it completely stops and there is nothing, so a lot of parents do not feel comfortable sending their kids to school on a bike. That is a real loss.

**MR COCKS:** The other piece of local infrastructure I am interested in, Dr Copland—and I do not think you have touched on it in your submission—is the condition of roads as well and those local roads. One of the complaints I have heard over time is about the use of chipseal road surfacing and its impact on the ability to cycle. That affects the kids learning to ride, and I understand that there are impacts on how easy it is to cycle as well.

**Dr Copland:** I do not know much about the particular types of road surfacing. I can take that question on notice and come back to you, if you would like.

**MR COCKS:** Yes; that would be really useful.

**Dr Copland:** Because I am not quite sure about that one, I will have to get back to you on that.

**MR COCKS:** That is fine. Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is about a just transition—seeing equity in transition. I

did note Pedal Power's campaign around Northbourne Avenue last week. A lot of the focus, to me, as a south-side member, appears to be on the inner north in terms of investment. The inner north and north Canberra have light rail. If we are talking about a just transition, and about access to bikes and e-bikes and government subsidising those things, I put to you: should we not be looking at further steps for Tuggeranong and how these policies will impact those people, if we are genuinely talking about a just transition?

**Dr Copland:** Yes; absolutely. I do not disagree with you on that. That Northbourne campaign is one element of the work that we are doing around active travel. We picked Northbourne because it is the busiest road and it is the one that the evidence shows has the most accidents for cyclists. So we feel like it is an important one in terms of stopping the physical harm that is happening.

At the other end of the scale, in places like Tuggeranong, Woden and west Belconnen, what we have is a situation where people are not getting on bikes because there is nothing there at all. That is the other thing that is happening. For example, we are working really closely with the government on having a fully separated route from the Woden town centre, down Adelaide Avenue into the city. We are pushing the government quite hard to not link that to the light rail because we do not want that to be delayed until 2033. We think that that should be coming earlier, in the first place. That project could be a thing that could be built in the next couple of years.

One of the critiques of having the Active Travel Plan is that it has a cycling network map and if you look at the map there are basically no new links in Tuggeranong and there are very few in places like Weston Creek as well. A disappointing thing that we think is missing here is thinking about some of those areas. I think the government, as it currently stands, does a lot of thinking about links between town centres and how you can go from A to B.

Going back to Ed's question, that does not actually solve a lot of those local issues. Let's look at every school, for example, and think about what routes people are taking to get to school, how we support that and what are the potential small missing links that are happening there. We certainly think that this is not just an inner-city issue; it is one that can connect out to all parts of Canberra. We have voluntary advocates, and me, working on all of those different elements all across the city.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it about more than just funding—not only subsidising EVs and e-bikes and infrastructure but also education? If kids and parents have not grown up on bikes, and it is not easy to get to work on a bike from Tuggeranong, do you think there needs to be more education around it?

**Dr Copland:** Yes; absolutely. The research shows us that most people's transport habits are developed when you are a kid and then it is hard to get out of those habits. If you take public transport as a child, if you catch a bus to school or if you ride to school, then you are more likely to transition to doing the same when you go to university or to TAFE or you get your first job or whatever it is.

I think that getting that early education is really important. Pedal Power do some of that work. We have learn-to-ride classes for kids. In Lyneham at the moment—this

has come from a community initiative and we are looking to see how we can expand it—we are supporting the development of a bike bus. Every Wednesday families get together and ride together in a group, so they feel that safety in numbers. We are looking at ways to expand that to other parts of the city and other schools that we can work with that are willing to do that. That kind of stuff is really important, but at the moment we are a small organisation and we cannot touch everybody. I think that there is some space for government to potentially be doing more educational work and to have more involvement in and around schools to help kids to get there safely.

Just on that, one of the benefits of that bike bus in Lyneham is that they have identified some of the very small, local issues that can then be fixed. One of those issues the government has responded to and is fixing straight away. They are often very small, quick ones that can then help with that local link that can be quite valuable. Having community on the ground, doing that work, can encourage people, provide that education and also provide intel to government on what needs to be fixed.

**MS CLAY:** I was interested to hear you lead with the Ginninderry example. It is certainly something that has been raised with me by constituents: that you can ride in Ginninderry but you cannot ride to there. We seem to have a bit of a desert in west Belconnen of separated infrastructure. Belconnen town centre is also pretty ghastly, frankly. You mentioned some flaws with the Active Travel Plan down south. Does the Active Travel Plan cover some of those deserts around Canberra? Is it a lack of funding or is it actually not identified properly?

**Dr Copland:** The plan, as we said, has a proposed cycling map and it does have some key links in west Belconnen that we think are really important—that is, how do you get from Ginninderry to Kippax and then Kippax into the Belconnen town centre. There are some links in the Belconnen town centre that are part of that now.

The challenge that we are finding is that, no matter how many times we ask, the public servants are not willing to give us a time line of when they think those things can be built. We often ask, “What is the next cab off the rank? What are you doing next?” and we cannot even get a straight answer on that, so it is hard to know what the priorities are. Things are drawn on a map. At the pace that infrastructure is currently being built, the things on that map will be built in the next 30 to 40 years, realistically, and that is just not good enough.

This is bike paths. They could be done quickly. For an example of the slowness of this, the Garden City Cycle Route has been on the map for quite a while now and construction still has not started, and it is being done in stages. This is about a 10-kilometre path and it is being done in stages. We expect that, in the stages it is being done, it might take nine years—something like that—to be built, which seems to be bizarre to us.

**MS CLAY:** Nine years for a 10-kilometre path! What a high priority project that is! Quite the time line.

**Dr Copland:** Yes; exactly. Given that that is the current one on the map, what about the ones that are down the track? What are they going to look like? When are they going to be built? We have no idea.



**MS CLAY:** When you have asked government to set time lines or when you have asked the directorate to tell you when these will get built, and they will not tell you, what is the reasoning for that?

**Dr Copland:** In terms of targets—how many people will get on bikes, for example—we have been told that they feel that it is basically hard to measure and hard to identify whether that is achievable or not. We believe that there is a fear that if they set targets then they will fail and there will be political backlash for not meeting the targets. That is our belief.

When it comes to the actual infrastructure projects, there is some what we might call “planning malaise”. It is just very slow. We are still trying to figure out why things take so long. We certainly get told that there are construction issues—issues with time lines for construction. We understand that, but we also say that a lot of these things can be done quickly, through pop-up lanes and through temporary solutions that then can be improved later down the track.

Another example of a project is that we have the pop-up lane that is happening in Kingston, which is one we are very supportive of. I think it is about a 500-metre pop-up lane. For some reason, that pop-up lane is going to take them two months to build, and it has taken them about 12 months to plan. The idea of pop-up lanes is that they are supposed to pop up. That is the whole language—that they are supposed to pop up. Yet we still get stuck in this kind of overplanning, I think, to the point where it becomes almost like paralysis via planning, where everything has to be done 100 per cent perfectly, and if we do not get it done 100 per cent perfectly then it is a failure.

We are saying the idea of a pop-up lane, for example, is that you should test it and you can take it out if it does not work. Do it and give it a go. If it does not work, if people hate it, then you can take it out, but the international examples show that they never get taken out, because people love them. That is the point: you have to do it. You can do your community consultation through this testing.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. We might end this session. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for giving your time today.

**Dr Copland:** Thank you for having me.

**Short suspension.**

**BOWLES, DR DEVIN**, Chief Executive Officer, ACT Council of Social Service

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Dr Bowles, CEO of ACTCOSS. I remind you of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm for the record that you understand the implications of this statement and agree to comply.

**Dr Bowles:** I understand.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you. If there is a theme in a number of submissions—and yours falls into this category, I think—it seems to be that a just transition is pretty fundamentally linked to economics and economic justice, and that some of the government's initiatives in climate change have not been as well targeted as they could have been. I wonder if you can talk to some of the programs and some of the issues you see in that space.

**Dr Bowles:** Yes. Thank you. I want to foreground the answer to that question with the acknowledgement that climate change itself is going to be very unequal in its impacts and will absolutely exacerbate inequities within Australia and within the ACT. We know that, for instance, the health consequences that will be experienced due to climate change will be felt more acutely by some people than others.

If you are wealthy and more likely to be in good health, with access to air conditioning, a heatwave might be an inconvenience, but it is not much more. If you are in poor health and in poor accommodation, or indeed living on the streets, a heatwave is potentially going to kill you. We know that the excess mortality that occurs during heatwaves is not evenly spaced across the community. Certain demographics, including older people, experience that excess mortality really disproportionately, as do children.

As that foregrounds the discussion, I think it is important to note that inequality has a number of drivers. Inequality is increasing across Australia, and that is the context in which all of this is happening. We have independent economic drivers of rising inequality; we also have climate change, which independently is driving inequality.

There are programs in the ACT to mitigate climate change, and the ACT's level of ambition in this space is one of the things that makes me proudest to be a Canberran. We are doing that well. As in many other jurisdictions, though, many of the incentives to get people to switch to new technologies, which are greener, are more easily utilised by people who are wealthier.

Things that require an up-front cost, such as switching from gas to electricity, may be out of reach for people on lower incomes. In particular, they are absolutely out of reach for people who are renting. People who are renting are basically at the mercy of their landlord as to whether or not they are going to live in a place where gas is used for heating and cooking.

Right now, the economic impacts of that change are not huge, but as more people shift away from the gas network that is going to absolutely increase the costs for each person remaining on it, because each person, in total, has to pay for upkeep of the whole network. That is one area where we have very acute concerns that the least well off in our community are going to be left holding what is a very expensive gas network and having to pay for its maintenance.

**MR COCKS:** You have referenced a couple of instances where the government has high ambitions for improving the situation caused by climate change but maybe is not quite hitting the mark. One of the concerns I hear raised about housing in particular—and you mentioned homelessness—is that there are a number of housing providers and landlords and people renting out properties who are now leaving the market because it is becoming expensive to operate in Canberra and provide those houses here in Canberra. What is going to be the impact if we see a reduction in rental availability?

**Dr Bowles:** I am not familiar with the literature about the number of landlords exiting the market. I guess my bigger concern is: are existing landlords able to and incentivised by government to transition the places they rent out to be as environmentally friendly and, not unrelatedly, as comfortable and as inexpensive to run as possible?

**MR COCKS:** There are clearly economic incentives, but if those houses stop being available for renters, it seems that the impact is going to be an increase in costs for renters. Is that an unreasonable assumption?

**Dr Bowles:** I think if there are fewer houses for rent then that will drive competition among renters. The flip side, though, is that on some level, in addressing a just transition, it would be easiest if everyone were an owner-occupier. The reason for that is that they would be incentivised to make the modifications to their homes that would make them as energy efficient as possible.

**MR COCKS:** Yes.

**Dr Bowles:** Many renters do not want to invest in double-glazing windows when they can be kicked out.

**THE CHAIR:** We were just talking to Pedal Power and I was commenting on how the north side of Canberra has light rail, which is a cheaper and efficient form of public transport. As a south sider, I see a lot of investment in active travel in the north side and would like to see more in the south side. They are advocating for more of a focus on electric bikes and things, but if you do not have the cyclepaths and routes worked out for those living in Tuggeranong—the furthest away—then it is not really a just transition. How important is efficient and effective public transport to this story? In terms of an equitable view of Canberra, how important is it that we get projects like light rail to the south side of Canberra?

**Dr Bowles:** I think public transport is absolutely part of a just transition. I think also that the technology of e-bikes is a game changer. To be honest, we have not really seen how much of a difference that could make, but there are a lot of families that are

now two-car families that could become one-car plus a bike families.

Your point about infrastructure like cyclepaths and active transport is really important. My own observation is that it does not seem to be distributed evenly across the city. When people use public transport, they often incorporate some degree of active transport into their overall transportation strategy, so complementing investments in public transport with investments in active transport infrastructure is really important. You need to have the two working together.

I might add a third thing, which is that right now the incentives around, for instance, electric vehicles—as I understand where we are up to at this point in time—do not cover e-bikes. That effectively means that people who cannot afford an electric car, which includes a lot of people, cannot make that transition in a way that is subsidised by government. Opening up that incentive to electric bikes would make the way that government is subsidising the transition much more equitable, because it would mean that virtually every family in Canberra could put their hand up and say, “Yes, I want to be part of this.”

**THE CHAIR:** I guess from a government perspective—and I have heard the Chief Minister talk about this—if you get an EV, an electric vehicle car, you are replacing a non-electric vehicle on our roads, whereas an e-bike does not necessarily replace a car. So, in terms of reducing emissions and transitioning, you are going to have the most impact with EVs, and also you build a second-hand car market—which actually, down the track, would make it more accessible. What is the difference between government policy that is really targeting emissions reduction versus policy that is accessible to all on all levels?

**Dr Bowles:** This, I think, comes back to my earlier comment that we actually do not know the full impact of this technology change to electric bikes. One of the things that I love about the ACT is that we are a laboratory for democracy for the rest of Australia. We are nimble enough to be able to be at the forefront of social policy change to see what happens.

I think there is a really strong case that Canberra should double down on electric bikes because, while some are not going to be replacing cars, their cost is relatively small compared to a car. The government’s supplement for an e-bike is smaller than it is for a Tesla. Without having done the maths, even if only one in three e-bikes replaces a car, we are still replacing the same number of cars for the same amount of money. At the same time, we are empowering people who may have their life opportunities constrained by lack of transport options, and we are doing that by making transport more equitable.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS CLAY:** That is interesting. I think you are right. We will check, but I believe the schemes at the moment are open to EVs—cars—and also electric motorbikes, which is interesting. The price point of those things when you buy them new is \$16,000 for an electric motorbike or \$40,000 to \$60,000 for an electric car. It is an interesting point you make that maybe subsidising electric bikes that are \$2,000 to \$6,000—if that replaced one in three—would be a better use of government funds. Was that sort

of the gist?

**Dr Bowles:** Yes. There is a real possibility that it would be, especially if the government is simultaneously expanding its investment in cycling infrastructure.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MR COCKS:** I just want to clarify: it sounds like you are saying that, while an EV may replace a car, an e-bike and probably other forms of innovative transport replace something else. They really replace vehicle miles travelled. Are we maybe measuring the wrong thing if we are just measuring the number of cars replaced?

**Dr Bowles:** I think the number of cars replaced is a good indicator because it is suggestive of miles. Also, part of the environmental impact of a car is in its manufacture and transport to the initial user. But you are right: supplementing that with additional information about the total number of car miles driven with an internal combustion engine would be helpful additional information.

To clarify my earlier remarks, I think some electric bikes will absolutely replace cars. Just speaking personally of the people who live around me in the inner north, where the cycling infrastructure is pretty good, a number of families with two or three kids have only one car. They are very explicit about saying, “And we have an e-bike.” For them it has replaced it. I think they are in a better position than many because of where they live, but I think there is the potential to see that pattern of families switching from two cars to only one and an e-bike. We do not know the rate at which subsidised e-bikes would replace cars, but if it were something like one in three then we would be getting excellent value out of that.

**MS CLAY:** I was struck by a section of your submission. Thank you for submitting to us and for reminding us of all of the detailed work that ACTCOSS has done in this field. It is incredibly valuable, and it was great to get those prior submissions in to this inquiry. There was a phrase there that said:

... much more is needed to support people on low incomes to access affordable and climate friendly transport and energy solutions.

The submission went on to say that government should be prioritising resources “for building accessible and widespread infrastructure”. Tell me what you mean by “accessible and widespread infrastructure”. Where do you think government should be directing most of its resources?

**Dr Bowles:** The reference to accessibility acknowledges that people with a disability may have different transport needs, and our overall transport system needs to be cognisant of those. For instance, I understand that if there are too many e-scooters left on footpaths, people on electric mobility scooters cannot navigate around them. That substantially impedes their mobility.

Infrastructure refers to a wide set of things. It is about having good bike paths. It is also about having a complementary public transport system and space for active travel to get you to and from public transport so that you can do that safely and conveniently.

For longer distances it can mean stops for having drinking fountains. In many areas it can mean having proper lighting for bike paths. It means, really, designing a transport system around people not having cars.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today and for ACTCOSS's submission.

**Dr Bowles:** Thanks very much.

**Hearing suspended from 10.22 to 11.11 am.**

**DONNELLAN, MR ANDREW**, Secretary, Greater Canberra  
**GRAMENZ, MS LUCY**, Committee Member, Greater Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to welcome you to today's hearing of the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity's inquiry into climate change and a just transition. Proceedings today will be recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. We are also being webstreamed live. When you take a question on notice, it is useful to say, "Can I take that as a question on notice." We will start by welcoming representatives from Greater Canberra.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Can I confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of that statement.

**Ms Gramenz:** Yes.

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** I noted in your submission you have quite a lot in there about decarbonising the transport sector and quite a lot in there about density and RZ1 zoning. Do you want to talk me through the just transition implications of those issues where you think the government needs to be doing something differently than what it is doing right now?

**Ms Gramenz:** Yes, sure. Our main point around transport emissions in relation to urban compact form is that the more sprawled the city is, the longer the distance is you have to travel, so therefore you are more likely to do that by car. Whereas, if we had more compact areas in our city closer to where people actually want to live, then it is a shorter distance to do that travel, so it is easy to do active transport and it is easy to do public transport. It is also cheaper because the infrastructure does not have to go as far.

**MS CLAY:** Do you think government policy has been supporting that lately or do you think there are things that government has not been doing that they should have been doing?

**Ms Gramenz:** There is definitely improvements that could be made with zoning. A lot of areas are like where I live in Griffith; there is density around, say, the Kingston shops, but elsewhere it is basically RZ1 zoning, which means that there is only really space for single dwelling, large sprawling homes that are out of the price range of most Canberrans.

**MS CLAY:** Yes, interesting. We have heard a lot about RZ1 on other committees but I was really pleased somebody raised this issue on this committee on just transition. What do you think are the risks if we do not do that kind of planning in density well, in terms of a climate change and just transition?

**Ms Gramenz:** I guess when we are talking about just transition, if we take an

example: if you are on a lower income, you do not have access to those single dwelling homes that are in the RZ zoning but you may have better access, or more chance to have access, to say a high density development in that area. Whereas, because we cannot build that in that area, those people may be pushed further and further out, away from the city. A solution could be an EV. But EVs are too expensive as well, so you are more likely to go further out and still rely on a fossil fuelled car to get you into the city. It is not exactly fair that we are putting more obstacles in the way for lower income people.

There is also a point to make that as we green our grid, those who do not have access to say solar panels and whatnot, because of the cost barriers, are more likely to have to absorb the costs than those people who are saving on solar, so it is a kind of a double-edged sword. You are being penalised for not being able to access this kind of renewable energy infrastructure.

**MS CLAY:** Yes. We heard that very strongly from ACTCOSS in the previous session, so it is good to have it reinforced. You also note in here the cost of greenfield development, and the risk of heat and bushfires with increasing greenfield development as well. Do you want to run me through the comments there?

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes. Essentially, greenfield development is pushing housing further out to the edges where it is exposed to the urban rural interface. We are talking about areas like Molonglo Valley and areas like the northern parts of Belconnen and Gungahlin. For the record, our organisation is not against all greenfield development; we accept that there is obviously a need for it. With those developments that are going further out into the urban rural interface, you have to put more and more effort into fire protection and mitigating the risks that come with being near forests, being near wide open grasslands and so on. Like the 2003 bushfires, obviously they affected all of Canberra in some fashion or another, but the places where they really affected people, where houses were burnt down, were up in Weston Creek, not the areas closer to the city, where we could be looking at more urban infill.

**MS CLAY:** In having looked at your submission, do you think our planning and infrastructure priorities for ACT government at the moment are consistent with our climate action goals and a just transition or not consistent?

**Mr Donnellan:** I think in many areas they are. They have been heading in the right direction. There is still a lot more to do to really encourage and allow the infill that we need to deliver new housing without the associated additional infrastructure cost. We need to encourage more effective use of our existing infrastructure—our existing transport infrastructure, public transport, roads and so on—allowing more public and active transport to be accessible to a broader number of people. We also need to reduce the need for the infrastructure associated with greenfield that is going to be needed to address the climate crisis.

**MR COCKS:** One of the areas I find interesting when I am out talking to people is a lot of people are quite supportive of making sure we have enough homes—more homes and more development—to make sure people can actually afford their own homes in the future. It seems like, in terms of justice, which this inquiry is looking at, it is a bit of an intergenerational question. That seems to be at the heart of where you



are coming from here. Is that a fair assessment?

**Ms Gramenz:** I would say partially, because you are more likely to not own your home, either an apartment or house or whatever, at a younger age and the market younger people are entering now is a lot less favourable than it was previously. I would say that there is also this ability to age in place as some older generations may also be looking to downsize into something that is suitable for them. I do not think phrasing it as intergenerational warfare is useful, but—

**MR COCKS:** It is certainly not my intention to imply that.

**Ms Gramenz:** But there are definitely some constraints, especially as the market now to access this housing is a lot harder than it has been for previous generations.

**MR COCKS:** Going along with that is the big concern I often hear—while people support more houses, more development, and they really want their kids to be able to afford a home in the future, they are worried about the quality of development. They are worried that we are going to not have green spaces and we are going to lose some of those things that make Canberra Canberra. Are there things you think we can do to ensure we have good quality development as we go forwards?

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes. Certainly, I think one of the critical things we need to get right with delivering density is making sure there is adequate effort put towards high quality public green spaces, and open spaces for residents living in those environments, to ensure they have the access to nature and access to quality green spaces that people currently talk about with reference to living out in the RZ1 low density suburbs. We think it is quite possible to deliver urban infill with appropriate design parameters to ensure people have access to that green space, so people have access to quality, well-maintained parks. Of course, the infrastructure costs of delivering high-quality, well maintained public green space, where the grass is mowed and the playgrounds are kept in working order and that kind of thing, are obviously cheaper if you are doing it for a larger number of people in one area than if you are maintaining more and more urban sprawl.

**MR COCKS:** Do you think there is an impact for other infrastructure that we need to make sure we are locating where there is development and infill happening? So local infrastructure, shops, local roads, footpaths, those sorts of things?

**Ms Gramenz:** Yes. Density should go hand-in-hand with active transport infrastructure like cycleways, public transport routes, all those things, as well as easy access to parks through bikeways and whatnot. The gold standard would be to have faith that a child or teenager would be able to ride themselves to a park rather than having to rely on their parent. So a lot of that, again, comes back down to transport. If we have more, safer streets—so smaller and slower—then they are going to be a bit more confident to let their kids bring themselves to parks and whatnot.

**Mr Donnellan:** There are also means like land use regulations, which allow for appropriate commercial use and community facilities to be located in the areas in existing suburbs where we are looking to boost the amount of infill. From a climate change perspective, what we want to see is people shifting away from having to drive

their car long distances. So having local amenities available and regulations that allow local amenities to evolve and emerge as the community around them evolves will mean that people can go for a quick walk down to the shops. They can get on their bike and cycle down to the local school, or the local community hall, or whatever it may be, and that is really, really important from a climate change perspective.

**THE CHAIR:** We have seen how successful the light rail corridor has been and the density along Northbourne Avenue, and how inner-north is driving higher-density than other parts of Canberra. My question is, in terms of an equitable transition, how important is light rail to the south of Canberra, and to Woden, and to see density grow along that corridor?

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes. Transport-oriented development is a key part of this, with transport corridors such as light rail but not exclusively light rail. We think light rail, obviously, provides the best opportunities for surrounding transport-oriented development, but we do not want to rule out TOD around the rapid bus routes as well. We certainly support improvements to the bus side of Canberra's transport infrastructure too.

With the delivery of light rail stage 2 down to Woden, we really want to see the ACT government being ambitious with the housing targets it has for delivery within that southern gateway corridor, because that will be providing more homes in close proximity to a really high quality public transport service that, as we have seen with stage 1, people want to use. Stage 1 saw a significant boost in patronage of the public transport system as a whole, but even more so on that Gungahlin to Civic corridor because people find it a high quality service, and we would like to see that.

**THE CHAIR:** When you talk about the government being ambitious along that corridor, in terms of zoning changes, do you think targeted zoning changes in suburbs along that corridor would be helpful, or do you think there should just be blanket zoning changes for the whole of the ACT?

**Mr Donnellan:** We need both. In areas around rapid transport corridors, we need to be setting higher ambitions for mid-rise and higher-rise dwellings because that is where developers are able to deliver those buildings with less of an impact in terms of traffic and parking and those other things, because people have access to an existing transport service that they want to use. But elsewhere in the territory, we do need to see uplift, upzoning towards allowing medium-density dwellings in the areas that are currently low-density. The transport-oriented development is fantastic. We need to see more of it. It will not do everything. So we need a combination of tactics.

**Ms Gramenz:** Yes. I agree with that.

**MR COCKS:** In terms of those RZ1 low-density areas, it sounds like the reforms that have come in, in terms of secondary dwellings, are not quite sufficient to—

**Mr Donnellan:** No.

**Ms Gramenz:** No, they are not as ambitious as we would like.

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes. We would refer the committee to the submissions that we made to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, as well as the Missing Middle Canberra coalition, where we partnered with a number of organisations such as the Conservation Council to call for broader upzoning for medium-density.

**MS CLAY:** I will just note I think you might be the youngest two witnesses we are hearing from, and I thank you for that. The reason I am making that point—and I would not usually make a personal point like that—is that I feel like the just transition conversation affects people under the age of 40 in a way that is different from people over the age of 40, and it also has a big impact on future generations. Do you think ACT government policy at the moment is serving people under the age of 40 well, or do you think there is room for improvement?

**Ms Gramenz:** Are we talking about housing in particular, or the just transition?

**MS CLAY:** The just transition, probably. Honestly, I would invite you to make whatever comments you would like to make. We do not often hear from people under the age of 40 on parliamentary committees.

**Mr Donnellan:** Yes. It is a real challenge to engage younger people. I think that is not just in the ACT; it is not a problem unique to this Assembly. It is something that, obviously, federal institutions, the public service and civil society organisations really struggle with. I think we do need to be looking at how the government can be more actively reaching out to solicit those opinions because those views are not going to emerge by themselves from people who are in the age group where they are busy studying, they are busy starting off their careers and working hard to try and afford their first home, and that kind of thing. It is harder to get those views and to hear that.

**Ms Gramenz:** I think we need a new vision, almost. Like, not just the single dwelling home as a symbol of status. We can have a medium-density city where you have good amenities, where there is space for you to grow, where you can live greener, so you are helping the climate crisis as well. I feel like that is not really talked about as a vision, and so people get stuck and they get resentful because they cannot have the single dwelling dream, or whatever. If we do a better job of selling what the world could look like, that, yes, it could be different but it is not necessarily going to be worse, then I think that might really get people a bit more engaged. At the moment, as I referred to before, sometimes it ends up in this intergenerational fight that is not productive for anyone.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We will wrap this up for today.

**Mr Donnellan:** We do have copies of an opening statement that we would like to hand up if that is helpful?

**THE CHAIR:** Fabulous, that would be excellent.

**Ms Gramenz:** Awesome, thank you.

**Mr Donnellan:** Thank you.

**Short suspension.**

## **COX, MR KEVIN**

**THE CHAIR:** We now welcome Mr Cox to today's hearing. In what capacity are you appearing today?

**Mr Cox:** My name is Kevin Cox. I am here really representing many different community organisations because I am a member of lots of groups. I am also here representing old people, who have similar sorts of problems to the young people.

**THE CHAIR:** I will remind the witness of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to that pink statement on the desk beside you. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. Can you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of that statement?

**Mr Cox:** I understand the implications and I will tell the truth.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you and let me say, it is a pleasure to welcome someone by the name of Mr Cox! It is not often I get to welcome someone with the same name, if spelt differently to myself.

I really appreciated the perspective you brought in your submission—in particular, the framing of climate justice and in terms of understanding that there is a very strong underlying economic dimension to that. I am wondering, can you speak a bit more to how that relates?

**Mr Cox:** Yes. You cannot get climate justice without economic justice. By justice, I mean that we should have the same access. It does not mean to say that we all have the same amount of money, that some people are not rich and so forth. What it means is that it is a fair go—when I pay something and I am poor, I pay the same amount as someone who is rich.

I will just give you a little bit of my personal history. I graduated in the 1960s. When I graduated electricity was a fixed price. It did not automatically go up with inflation, but it tended to go up with inflation. It was cheap, relatively speaking, and because I was in Tasmania it was green. I could buy a house for five years of my salary. I had no student debt. We can do the same thing today. We can change the economic system so that that can be true today.

Today, 90 per cent of the new wealth goes to the top 10 per cent! When I found this out, I was staggered. In my time, 90 per cent of new wealth went to the bottom 90 per cent of the population. It has completely inverted. What has happened? I went to investigate how this can be? This is ridiculous.

What has actually happened? Well it seems that it actually happened as a result of—and it is one of the emergent properties of—the change to the banking regulations in 1980. That change had some good points to it, but it led to the fact that bank loans, which are new money that comes into the economy, are now the dominant form of

transferring existing assets from one person to another person. You think about that for a moment. We have existing assets, and we create new money, which costs a lot to actually create, because someone has to make a profit to repay the loans. We have this bizarre situation where we create new money to transfer old assets. We do not have to do that. If we did not do that, we could, I believe, from the little modelling that I do, switch it back to the stage at which we all can afford houses, literally. We really can do it.

We can do it almost overnight, because it is just a bookkeeping change. It is not the change in the way in which we do anything. It is a bookkeeping change, and it is a change in the way in which we govern things. It is something that cannot be done without the assistance of the government, because the government sets the rules and regulations. The rules and regulations now are set to favour wealthy people.

For everything that you hear here, such as that poor people are sicker, all these terrible things, the reason is that they do not have any backup wealth that they can call upon when times get tough. Almost all the wealth now goes to the richest people. That has an interesting effect. When you accumulate wealth, the wealth stays still; it becomes stagnant. It does not move. We only get new wealth when we invest.

So what we have now is this bizarre situation where in the wealthiest countries in the world productivity is going down. You can get really high productivity in a country like China, but in China productivity is now starting to close down because some people are getting more wealth and they are not using it. The secret to success, if you like, and a way in which you can get climate, housing and health justice et cetera is to speed up the movement of money by effectively sharing wealth, by sharing the profits associated with things.

**MR COCKS:** This government has had a big focus on incentives and subsidies when it comes to climate change. I am very interested in your perspective on the targeting of those and whether those are an effective, equitable way to approach this—

**Mr Cox:** No. The answer is no. Incentives go to the rich. They do not go to the poor, because that is the way we have organised it. What we need is not money from the government. We do not need money from the government. We, the community, need the ability to be able to organise and to access funds ourselves.

I will give you another little story. I set up a company or a cooperative. With other people, I set up a little cooperative, and the idea was that we would fund our neighbours' houses' solar panels. I got a little grant from the ACT government to do this. We set it up. We put solar panels that we paid for on someone's roof. We proved the economic model. We showed that people could pay for their panels from the savings that they made. I was very pleased. This is all great.

I then go and try to get finance. You would not believe what happened. We could not get finance for a cooperative. We could not get finance for people in the cooperative who were, like me, old. I could not even get a zero-interest loan, because I am too old. Renters cannot get these things. So the finance was not available to us. It was not available to us, because both the rules and regulations and the mindset of financiers is that they want to make a profit. They do not want you to make a profit. So the whole

system is set up to enable, again, rich people to get richer; not to have an equitable playing field in the whole thing. It is unfair.

That is the problem we have to solve, and you guys can actually solve it very quickly. You really can. I cannot go to my neighbours and say, “Look, a super fund is not allowed to invest in this scheme.” How can I go and ask for them to give us money when a super fund would not? The government does not agree with it. How can I go and ask people to do that sort of thing or join together themselves and do this sort of thing? That is the problem associated with it.

**THE CHAIR:** Following on from your examples then, I spoke to an over-65 living company that builds aged care and the whole longer-term living. They were saying that Canberra is a very different market because older people stay in their homes a lot longer than in other cities and that there really is a cultural difference here. I am interested in what you were saying around how wealth is locked up and a lot of people in Canberra—older people, I think—are asset rich and cash poor.

What sort of shifts or incentives or transitions need to happen? We heard from Greater Canberra in the last session, who were talking about a vision; that perhaps the vision is not the block with the big house on it. It is not just young people who need a new vision. What would be the vision and how do we transition for our older generation?

**Mr Cox:** My wife and I would be crazy to go into one of these things. The moment you do that you effectively lose half the value of your property. I would like to stay where I am or move to another place without losing half the equity I have in my home. Effectively, that is what happens when you do that. When you sit down and do the numbers, you say, “What? This is ridiculous.”

Doing what I am talking about will enable me, for example, to start to sell my house while I am still there. Well, as long as I stay old! If I stayed, I would make the place more insulated, get more solar panels, et cetera, making the place better for the next person that comes along. That is what we would do if we changed the way in which we are able to finance the house and own the thing.

What is really bad is that banks, who create money and make a profit out of the creation of money, are agents of the government. That is the job they do. They do not share the profit with the people who actually pay the extra money. The Reserve Bank could, again, tomorrow solve inflation and reduce the price of housing, simply by telling the banks to share some of the future interest they collect.

You do not see these things when you look at normal economic modelling. It does not work that way. I effectively use what is now called complexity economics. This treats the economy like a living animal, or like the weather, and uses the same sorts of tools and techniques we have devised to work out how those complex systems can interact and work together. When you use those sorts of models you get a different answer and an answer that actually works. The current economic modelling does not work; it cannot predict anything. You get all these predictions as to what the interest rates are going to be. For crying out loud! I mean, you should know that, and you should be able to do that. The modelling is arcane and very old-fashioned.

**MS CLAY:** Mr Cox, this has been fascinating, thank you. I very much appreciated your submission; you led quite a lot of information from the Australia Institute and it has been really good.

You have spoken to us about Evoenergy and local energy markets and we have not heard much about that. You have also mentioned a lot of things that could be changed and rules and regulations to address this, but all of the ones I have written down so far are federal: superannuation, federal tax settings and the RBA. Can you tell me anything that the government could do with rules and regulations from the ACT government, or alternatively, can you tell me about your big ideas for Evoenergy?

**Mr Cox:** Well, it is the same as what I did with Pre Power. All you need to do is to allow community organisations—and it could be a company, but a community company owned by the people—to be able to access finance. That is all you need to do. You would not believe the barriers when you try to do this. As I said, I am old and I cannot get a loan. It is not rocket science. It is really simple stuff to do, to give people access to money.

**MS CLAY:** That would be something that the ACT government could do with regulatory—

**Mr Cox:** We can do it now but you cannot ask people to do it unless the government endorses it. It is not normal to do these things and people are very suspect of the whole thing until someone else does. it. The banks will not do it. Why would they? They are making a fortune as it is at the moment, but you can make the banks do it and you can get more profit.

**MS CLAY:** I reckon that is federal, though, unfortunately. I do not think we have—

**Mr Cox:** No, no, no. All that it means is that you say to a financial institution, “Well, look. These people want to do this and we think it is a good idea.” You do not have to say—

**MS CLAY:** It is just a government endorsement.

**Mr Cox:** Yes, it is just an endorsement. It is a matter of confidence.

**MS CLAY:** Can you tell me what specifically government endorsement looks like in that form? Is it like a cover letter or like a program? What does it look like?

**Mr Cox:** Endorsement would be that the government decides to lend some money under these conditions itself. We do not want handouts. We want access to finance. The government could invest in these things itself, particularly public housing, and get a nice profit, because making the money move quicker creates more investment, which creates more money that goes to the people involved, not to some external shareholder.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today. The committee is very grateful for your submission and time.

**Mr Cox:** I will send anything else that you want. I think I might have already sent you how you can set up one of these things for housing, because housing is actually the simplest to do. It is really trivial.

**THE CHAIR:** Great, thank you.

**Short suspension.**



**BALLARD, DR ALLISON**, President, ACT Volunteer Brigades Association  
**HOLMES, MS GEORGIA**, Policy and Communications Advisor, Master Electricians Australia

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome representatives from the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association and Master Electricians Australia. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications.

**Dr Ballard:** Yes, I do.

**Ms Holmes:** Yes, I do.

**THE CHAIR:** Fantastic. We will move to the members for questions.

**MS CLAY:** I enjoyed reading about the pipeline of skilled labour that we need in the ACT for this just transition. Can you let me know some of the things that we should be doing that we are not doing right now to make sure we have that pipeline of skilled labour?

**Ms Holmes:** Is that directed to the Master Electricians?

**MS CLAY:** Yes.

**Ms Holmes:** We are hearing back from our members quite regularly that there is too much focus on the ATAR ranking and that is, unfortunately, creating a pathway for students to go towards more higher education, and commercial and corporate-type careers.

**MS CLAY:** Is that a cultural problem in our schools or is that some kind of hard setting in our schools that we are focusing on ATAR ratings rather than other skills?

**Ms Holmes:** We have been consistently advocating that it is a systemic issue, so it is something that needs to come from government, top down.

**MS CLAY:** Yes, interesting. We have certainly highlighted that we need more skills in this area, and I think we will be competing with every other state and territory for the same skill sets, so it is a problem. As well as changing the systemic issue of getting more of our own Canberran young people into different careers, are there any other things that you think the ACT government should be doing that we are not doing on this pipeline issue?

**Ms Holmes:** I am sure it is already being done, but we have also been advocating for consistent efforts with the GTOs—we believe they are making a great effort—and really streamlining efforts there.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MR COCKS:** Dr Ballard, I am interested in the improved equity section of your submission. It is fairly brief. I wonder if you could expand on your views around equity.

**Dr Ballard:** It is largely around the allocation of the budget. If you look at the allocation of the ACT budget in relation to the emergency services agencies, the two combined volunteer services—the Rural Fire Service and the State Emergency Service—receive, my understanding is, around six to seven per cent of the budget that is allocated to ESA, with the remainder going to the career fire service and the Ambulance Service, so it is a very small percentage of the budget. When you look at the number of volunteers, we have over 500 volunteer firefighters in the ACT, which is somewhat more than the number of career firefighters we have, and in the SES the same sorts of numbers apply, so we have got more than a thousand volunteers in the ACT in emergency services, which would be significantly more than the combined career services together. Even a small increase in funding would make a difference to things like attracting volunteers.

After the 2019-2020 bushfires, we had no problems attracting more volunteers, but retention is a real thing, and that flows into the facilities that you provide for volunteers. We have got, I think, about eight brigades in the ACT. If you look at Hall, the Hall brigade does not have a toilet for its female volunteers. There is a unisex toilet, but it does not have a female toilet. We all work out of sheds, which is fine; we are used to that because we are volunteer firefighters, but there should be equity around those sorts of things.

At our southern station, the southern districts at Tharwa, the space allocated for that facility also is not optimal. There are female volunteer firefighters who are accosted, because there is a general store there, and my understanding is that some people drink there and then the female firefighters, when they go to training, may get accosted by those people. If we had better facilities and accommodation for our volunteers, those sorts of concerns would be minimised.

When you look at the allocation of the budget, we have three new stations being built for the ACT Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue at a cost of \$150 million. Those new facilities will have, for the Ambulance Service and for the career fire service, their own gyms, their own commercial kitchens and their own training areas—we do not mind. There is a facility at Mitchell, an old health facility, which is being upgraded to house our Gungahlin brigade RFS and SES at a cost of \$7 million, which is fine, because that will be a good facility, probably one of the best in the ACT. But, that said, the government is still clawing back a corner of that for the Ambulance Service. You think, “If the government is spending \$150 million building state-of-the-art facilities for the Ambulance Service and the Fire and Rescue service, why can’t all of those facilities be included in the new stations without taking away from RFS and SES?”—so that we can have a dedicated facility where we can do our training. It is those sorts of issues and inequity.

When you look at New South Wales Fire and Rescue, they have recently built, I understand, three brand new fire and rescue stations at a cost of \$15 million. It is nice to have state-of-the-art facilities, but you have to look at being fair. If we want to be

able to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters and SES, we need to look after them better. It is not about pay, but if you think about our more than a thousand volunteers here—even across the country we have more than 200,000 volunteer firefighters—and if you were paying those people on parity with what the career fire service is paid, the country would go broke.

It is very important that we are able to retain our volunteers, because the climate is not getting any better. Ever since Canberra was formed, basically, we have been subject to bushfires. We have relied on volunteer firefighters to protect the community. Our association was formed around 40 years ago, I think, following the fires in 1985, or 1983, when Canberra was circled by a ring of fire. At that time the volunteer firefighters got together and said, “We need to have an association.” It is those sorts of issues that are of concern. It is really around inequity in funding. We are very well looked after as far as things like uniforms and trucks and things like that go, but it is those other sorts of issues with facilities. Also, around consultation: there is very little consultation. Within ESA it is fine, and there has been a change, and we have a new commissioner. There is great consultation within RFS, within SES and within the broader ESA, but there are concerns about some sort of breakdown between JACS, which is really like our home directorate, and their services. The common feeling seems to be that there is a lack of understanding on the part of career public servants within JACS of what volunteers do and what the value of volunteers is.

I think part of that problem is that we really do not do any sort of costing of the work that volunteers do. We looked at the figures for 2019-2020 and how many person hours and things like that were contributed by volunteers, but that is only a very small part of the work that volunteers do, both SES and RFS. Each brigade will have its own committee; it has its own president; it has captains. All of those people are involved in going to captains’ meetings which focus on operational things for RFS and the presidents. There was work around that. The training is something that we all do in our own time. The training is often provided by other volunteers, so not only are they fighting the fires, but they are also doing the training of the other volunteers.

Between our 1,500 SES and RFS staff we have got the equivalent of one and a half HR people. That is extraordinary. When you look at ambulance and fire and rescue, they have their whole training teams. They have whole HR teams dedicated to their staff. Volunteers require different things. Even looking at things like enforcing a code of conduct with volunteers becomes problematic when you do not have staff who are especially skilled to do those sorts of things.

My understanding is that in the last business case that RFS and SES put up to government they asked for a dedicated HR person and that was denied. I think the only thing extra that was granted was dry-cleaning for the uniforms of volunteers; that is about it. We are going to be looking at more fires and more destruction in the future, so if we do not want to have to pay firefighters, which I think the community cannot afford, then we need to look at what things we can do to actually keep volunteers and to look after them.

It is not about looking after them in a financial sense, because most volunteers are not interested in being paid. That is not what their motivation is for volunteering; it is assisting the community. Not all but the majority of volunteers would be offended at

the idea of being paid for the work that they do. That is not why they do it. But, that said, the government really needs to do something about looking at all of the work that the volunteers do and putting a money figure on it, because that is one way that the government will be held to account for the work that is done. If you do not value something, if you do not put a monetary figure on it, often it is just ignored. I think that is something that needs to be done, and that should not be too hard.

When I do my work for the VBA, that is also all volunteer. I go to a lot of meetings with ESA and RFS in that capacity and none of that is caught. It is the same for our other members who are doing things. At the moment, the only way the work that we do is captured is if we go to the station and sign in at the station and then sign out of the station. If I go from home out to Hume to do training, that is not captured. Coming here today is not captured. There must be some facility for capture. The government would be good at capturing the work done by its public servants, so why can't it capture the work done by its volunteers so that it can actually put a money figure on it? I think that would help improve the equity. Rather than just paying lip-service to the important work that volunteers do, that might actually make a difference.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you. It sounds like, in terms of the justice aspect of this inquiry, it comes back to recognising the burden and the value side of responding to climate issues, which is undertaken by our volunteer brigades.

**Dr Ballard:** Exactly. Yes, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is to Ms Holmes. We have the Sustainable Household Scheme here in Canberra, which subsidises solar batteries, electric vehicles and that type of thing. I am wondering, given that you are a national body, if there are other jurisdictions that are doing things in different ways to stimulate the transition to electric products that would be useful for us to know about here?

**Ms Holmes:** I think a lot of it is fairly repetitive throughout the states. We are trying to encourage it. Some are leading more than others we are putting work into. A lot of it is rebate policies, largely. We are trying to push for the loan scheme that is happening here, which is great. A lot of it is battery, solar or package-type rebates.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any other schemes or ways to stimulate this that you could recommend?

**Ms Holmes:** In terms of non-financial policies, we do have a few that we try to implement. We have got the time-of-use tariffs that we are trying to push and EV bidirectional charging, so it is really giving a financial incentive to consumers—away from the climate target, while having a beneficial duo.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you speak about both of those things a little bit. What are they?

**Ms Holmes:** With the time-of-use tariffs, what we are basically trying to establish is a price signal for consumers so that it would be a two-way network. Currently it is a single-way network from the big retailers through to the consumers. We want to be able to allow consumers to generate clean energy at their houses, and that way they can provide excess solar energy that they have either stored or are generating at the

time, and then they can provide it back to the grid. The point of the time-of-use tariff is to send a price signal to prevent oversupply from consumers, and they get a rebate in return for that as an incentive. Alternatively, they could store the energy at a home energy battery system, and that would allow them to store the energy for when prices are high, so it would be lot cheaper and lower energy bills for them. The EV bidirectional charging comes in in the sense that it creates a reservoir to store the battery because of the size of it. That is another policy we are trying to push from that.

**THE CHAIR:** We heard from the person who gave evidence in the previous hearing about cooperatives, and we have heard previously in other inquiries about batteries and neighbourhood batteries and that type of thing—co-op arrangements. Do you see value in promoting those types of arrangements?

**Ms Holmes:** Our position is that that is not necessarily the most beneficial way to address climate resilience. Those are still going to rely on transmission lines. The point of the independent solar generator units is that they are at the house, so if there is interruption with the transmission lines, it is not going to be as big of an issue for flexible lines. Also, it is creating a co-investment with the public, so it creates a greater sense of responsibility and allows them to take greater control of their prices.

**MS CLAY:** Dr Ballard, I was interested in the sections of your submission about PTSD, which is ghastly and prevalent—and probably a genuine turn-off for recruitment, I imagine—and, also, the gaps in presumptive compensation. I know I have seen quite a lot of movement on that, but it is obviously not there yet. Can you tell me what more we need to do in the ACT to deal with that?

**Dr Ballard:** In relation to things like PTSD and where it is recognised in a number of other states and territories, I do not have those to hand. I think Tasmania was the first state to recognise presumptive PTSD in respect of its ambulance officers, so that is something that we could do here. I know that we are covered—volunteers are covered—in respect of workers compensation generally if they are attending a fire or on deployment, but there has not been anything as far as PTSD goes, so that would be good.

We did submissions, I think, after the 2019-20 bushfires when there was a federal inquiry, and one of the recommendations was that ACT volunteers be also covered for the presumptive cancers. I remember Senator Pocock made representations in federal parliament, and that was supposed to have changed, but my understanding is that the ACT government also has to do something with its legislation in order to give that force. My understanding is that that has not happened. I have not had any communication to the effect that that has happened. If it has happened, that is great, but if it has not, then it would be good to pursue that and good to pursue presumptive PTSD. I do not think it is going to be a huge claim area—in the same way that the presumptive cancers have not been either. There has not been an opening of the floodgates.

I used to work for the UFUA with the aviation firefighters, and we handled some of those claims. Even with the number of firefighters that they had across the country who worked out of airports there were not a significant number of claims. I suspect, for volunteers, it would similarly be the case, because we are not exposed continually.

It is largely dependent on bushfires and when we are doing prescription burns or hazard reduction burns, but there is that exposure. It is not about too many claims being made either for PTSD or for any of the other workplace injuries. It is if those things do eventuate that there is a pathway for volunteers to follow to make those claims, and then the presumption is that the injury they sustained was as a result of the volunteer work that they did.

**MS CLAY:** From the volunteering—yes, absolutely. It sounds like the law on workers compensation might be there, but it sounds like, in the ACT, we might have some outstanding recommendations, and it probably is up to us to ask the ACT government, “Have we landed?—

**Dr Ballard:** Have we done that, yes.

**MS CLAY:** Have we implemented all of these aspects to ensure that volunteers are presumptively assumed to have incurred their PTSD and other injuries in the course of their volunteering and can they access compensation and support as a result of that?”

**Dr Ballard:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** Are those the right two questions?

**Dr Ballard:** Yes, those are the right two questions.

**MS CLAY:** Great, thank you.

**Dr Ballard:** Thank you.

**MR COCKS:** I am interested, Ms Holmes, in the impact of EVs. It seems like your submission is fairly supportive of EVs and using EVs in different ways, but we have had some concern about the equity of governments investing in EVs. Does your organisation have any information about the types of places that EVs and the EV-to-battery type arrangements are being adopted?

**Ms Holmes:** We have a more high-level response on the EVs, but it is not our expertise specifically.

**MR COCKS:** Yes.

**Ms Holmes:** I think it is the new vehicle-efficiency-standard type stuff, and there are electric vehicle charging infrastructure consultations going on, so they are currently in the process of working on that.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is also for Ms Holmes. I do not own an electric vehicle, so I am a bit ignorant on this. You talked about the bidirectional tariffs just before. Your submission says that you strongly recommend preferencing bidirectional charged enabled vehicles in ACT government incentives. What exactly is that? Is it all EVs that are bidirectional?

**Ms Holmes:** It ties in to the household as well, so it is kind of an all-round policy with the time-of-use tariffs; they are connected. Basically, the idea is that you have got the solar—sorry, tell me if I am not answering your question.

**THE CHAIR:** This is perfect.

**Ms Holmes:** There is a solar PV on the rooftop of the house that takes in the sunrays and then the EV, and the purpose of that, as part of our policy, is that it has got the massive battery storage, so that can be used to store the excess energy; that is a place to store it. Then during night-time, when energy prices are high, or because you have got it and you do not want to use the energy from the national energy market, you can use the EV battery storage. That is the bidirectional charging aspect: you can charge your EV from the solar and you can also store it to use flexible loads for your house, like your lights, et cetera. Then the time-of-use tariffs come from that, when you can utilise that stored battery from there. I can go into more aspects. I am sorry, sometimes it is a bit too high level—

**THE CHAIR:** So do all EVs have that technology to be able to be that battery for the house?

**Ms Holmes:** My understanding is yes. I would have to get back to you on that. It is not my area of expertise, but I believe it is the infrastructure between the EV and the household.

**THE CHAIR:** And it needs government support to support that infrastructure; so people cannot do that now?

**Ms Holmes:** Again, it is infrastructure lagging. It is more policies to support the implementation of it.

**THE CHAIR:** Okay; thank you.

**MS CLAY:** On that, when you say, “policies to support”, do you mean loans or subsidies or regulation or something else?

**Ms Holmes:** We are promoting all of them. We have got financial policies and the non-financial, so we are promoting for the rebates and the low-cost loans, and we are also promoting the time of use, EV-bidirectional-charging-type ones.

**MS CLAY:** Yes, great. I also noticed in your submission that you had a line in there that has not been picked up by many of our other witnesses about how we can help build the domestic battery manufacturing and recycling industry, which is another part of our skills shortage, really. Do you think that governments supporting just transitions really well are actually likely to help create those start-of-life and end-of-life, whole life cycle, sort of solutions?

**Ms Holmes:** Yes. Our perspective on that is it is all economics, basically—that flow on effect.

**MS CLAY:** Yes.

**Ms Holmes:** If you create increased demand, there is going to be increased supplier demand, increased labour demand and all those sorts of things, so naturally we would expect the domestic economy to learn from that—to increase, anyway.

**MS CLAY:** Yes; thank you.

**MR COCKS:** I would like to understand a bit more about the labour challenges that we are facing as well. It seems to me that a push towards all-electrification is going to really have a pretty direct impact on that. What is the level of skill shortage we are facing now, and do you have projections around how that is going to change in the coming years?

**Ms Holmes:** Yes. I can only, in terms of actual projections, work off what we have been receiving in emails and news alerts. The electrical industry has been identified in a job skill shortage by Jobs and Skills Australia, and our members are feeling it. We are constantly hearing that feedback. Our position is that if we do not take immediate action now by creating some meaningful, sustainable impact, there is going to be a continued issue, especially with electrification. It is going to require ongoing maintenance work. It is not just a matter of installation. It is going to need to get sustainable, skilled labour.

**MR COCKS:** Yes. That is an important point I think we have not picked up before: the need for maintenance in the medium to longer term as well. It seems like electrification is not just a set-and-forget exercise.

**Ms Holmes:** No, absolutely not. It is our position that through the ATAR equal weighting with our vocational education and training secondary schools—sorry, that is a bit of a mouthful—that people can then understand from a younger age that electro-technology is an emerging, prosperous career to go forward.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Ballard, my question is for you. In the ACT government submission, they talk a lot about upskilling and building a strong workforce to decarbonise and electrify our city. Are there challenges for the volunteer fire brigades to understand the new contexts of housing in terms of batteries and solar and different products in houses that they may come into contact with, and also in upskilling in terms of electrifying your processes and practices?

**Dr Ballard:** Obviously most of our work centres on fighting fires and doing prescription burns or hazard reduction burns, but we do get called to protect assets. They are usually buildings, and, increasingly, those buildings will have batteries—rooftop solar and things like that. So, there is, I think, definitely a need to upskills our volunteers in respect of that. That is not an area of training that, as a volunteer firefighter, I have been exposed to or seen. I do not think that is on the agenda, so I think that that is definitely an area, and certainly with electric vehicles as well.

We do some training around electric vehicles, because if we are out in the bush and a



vehicle has been set on fire, we might be called to put that out, and that represents a real risk because of the different ways that those vehicles can burn and what happens in relation to that, so it represents different risks for the firefighters. We do some training around that, but I think that is something that can also be enhanced with better training, particularly if we are, like during Black Summer, also doing some of the work like patrolling some of the city areas and things like that. While it is not our normal area of work, it is certainly something that we would be looking at with village firefighting in some of the smaller communities in times of bushfire, when we are working particularly outside the ACT, or if we are looking at somewhere like Tharwa or some of those smaller communities—Pialligo and around those sorts of areas. I think it would be important to do that.

**MS CLAY:** On that, we have had a number of witnesses talk to us about the costs of sprawl—the environmental and financial costs of sprawl. They have specifically talked about bushfire risk as we are further and further on the outskirts—

**Dr Ballard:** The costs of sprawl?

**MS CLAY:** Sprawl, yes—a completely different topic. This hearing is wide-ranging. It is interesting that you talk about your volunteer firefighters in some of the more distant areas. Do you see any risks or anything we need to do differently with an expanding urban perimeter and with some of these more remote places in a higher fire risk time?

**Dr Ballard:** I think that if the government is looking at pushing the borders out, and with urban sprawl and things like that, then there needs to be a reassessment of how many stations we have—how many Rural Fire Service stations we have. Do they need to be consolidated? We have a nice station out at Tidbinbilla and southern. If the borders are pushed out, there needs to be a reassessment of where our volunteer fire brigades are located.

There is, I think, an issue around some of the New South Wales RFS brigades that border us, and I think it might go back to the fact that they are not able to attract volunteers. At the Wallaroo Station, for example, a lot of the members are drawn from the Gungahlin population, and that would be probably the case in respect of other areas, so they are going and fighting in other areas. But I think the main thing is just to keep an eye on where our stations are. We might do some emergency responding—so lights and sirens responding—on occasion, but often it is more about redeploying. It is not necessarily—though it can be—fire and ambulance, where we are responding with lights and sirens from the station, so I think a broader range of issues can be considered when you are looking at where those stations should be located.

With the urban sprawl, I think there needs to be an awareness of the bushfire risk that comes with that, because as we encroach with the suburbs into the bush, it is going to represent more of a risk, particularly with climate change and the increasing risk of bushfires. How are those communities protected on the fringes there? I know that the RFS does a lot of work with the rural landholders around education and those sorts of things, and our brigades will also do that. Tidbinbilla, for example, will work with some of the communities in their area and the resorts to provide bushfire training and things like that. I think the main thing is just to maintain an awareness of it and then to

look critically when the infrastructure is expanding: are our rural fire services located optimally in order to be able to address any fires that might occur there?

**MS CLAY:** It is interesting. Not always, but often, the people who are living in the further reaches are new Canberrans and people who are less wealthy. That is often why they have chosen to live there, so in terms of a just transition, they are probably more exposed to a risk.

**Dr Ballard:** Yes, they are probably more at risk, and particularly if you are looking at language problems and things like that. We do a lot of community education, and we have some things in languages, but I think that when we have a very diverse community with a lot of different cultural and language backgrounds, that is also something that needs to be borne in mind, and, sometimes, the relationship of those people to people in positions of authority, so people wearing uniforms. It can be quite different. Most Australians would be used to what bush firefighters do, and they would not necessarily have a fear of the uniform, whereas other members of the community may. There is a need for community education around those areas, I think, particularly.

**MS CLAY:** Interesting. You led us through some of your doubts about whether government had properly costed the value of the volunteer force, and I was interested in that because on a previous committee we actually saw the value of environmental volunteers costed by our independent Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment. I think she came up with a figure of \$51 million. I could have that wrong, but she costed the volunteer labour, and it was an immense number—much, much greater than anybody had expected.

**Dr Ballard:** Yes, it is enormous.

**MS CLAY:** Do you think the government has properly costed the value of the volunteer labour and the need for the firefighting resources that we are going to need in an expanded city?

**Dr Ballard:** No, I do not think that the government has done that. Last year we did a training exercise up in the Brindabellas. It was a driver training exercise just with volunteers from our brigade. There were probably about 20 of us, and we took three vehicles up, I think, into the Brindabellas on that day, and we were away for a few hours. I did a costing, and it was just like a back-of-the-napkin costing for that training exercise, which was all on our own initiative and our own time, obviously, with ACT government vehicles: it was well over \$100,000. That is just on a Saturday going up and doing driver training to maintain our skills and so that we get to know the area. Part of it was familiarising ourselves with the Brindabellas so that we know those areas, because, obviously, they are at risk of burning, so there was a dual purpose.

My understanding is that the government has not done any of that sort of costing at all. If it is there, I would love to see it. I think that that is probably an issue that is shared across other rural fire services across the country as well. I have gone out to the other associations, and I am collecting data from them about these sorts of things, but, generally, I would say that there is not a proper costing of the work that is done by

volunteers. Particularly, if you look at the enterprise agreement for the Fire and Rescue service in the ACT, it is incredibly generous—the conditions and the salary and everything. If you costed the work of the volunteer firefighters using that enterprise agreement—which would, I think, be a legitimate way to do it—then I think that that would maybe sort of open the government’s eyes a little bit about the true value.

It is not just about paying lip service to it and saying, “Well, aren’t you fantastic—all you volunteers!” If you do not put an economic number on the value of that work, people do not value what they do not pay for. I think that is what sits at the heart of it, and the lack of understanding about what is driving and motivating volunteers. You cannot rely on that goodwill. You need to actually do proper costing so that you can actually say, “This is the value that our volunteers provide to Canberra ratepayers. If you were paying these people on par with career firefighters, this is what it would cost you.” I think that the government would be astounded. Again, it comes back to that equity issue.

I think, particularly in the lead-up to the election, where enterprise agreements are being renegotiated, those sorts of things, as far as equity is concerned, also need to be considered. Again, it is around power. I am a strong unionist, and I have always been a unionist, but we as volunteers do not have a union, so in some ways we are quite hamstrung. We cannot advocate for ourselves as well as people who are represented by unions, so there is probably work to do in that sort of space as well, I think.

**MR COCKS:** My question is I guess in some ways related. You made a comment earlier that in the wake of the 2020 fires you saw an increase in volunteers but that it has been proving difficult to retain volunteers.

**Dr Ballard:** Yes.

**MR COCKS:** We have got another inquiry going into bushfires as well, and I hope we can share some of the learnings across, but I am interested if you know what it is that is making it difficult to retain volunteers.

**Dr Ballard:** ESA at the moment is looking at doing a survey. In the same way that there are staff surveys done for ESA they are looking at doing a survey for volunteers. Some of that information might be gleaned from that. As I understand it, the average retention period for new volunteers is five years. That is not very long, whereas there are a lot of volunteers who will stay for decades providing service. I do not know whether that is a generational thing, or whether there are other things, or the fact that people join because they think it is exciting and they are going to fight fires and then there are no fires.

After 2019-2020 there were lots of fires and you could go and fight fires, and that was exciting. A lot of people think, “That looks good. The SES like putting tarps on roofs. That looks exciting.” But then when they join there is no way to maintain that enthusiasm if we do not have rural fires. I remember having a conversation with a career firefighter working at an airport many years ago, and he had been in the service for 40 years as a firefighter and had not fought a single fire—that is a whole career. I think it is like a microcosm of that—if there are no fires. I guess it is then up to RFS

to try and find some ways to maintain engagement, and they do. We went from 2019-2020 straight into COVID, so there were lots of things like RFS volunteers helping with doing things like the COVID distribution and delivering food packages and all of those sorts of things, supporting the SES. I do not think that that work was all caught.

There are other things with the SES as well, like helping with police searches. We help if the AFP is looking for evidence or if they are looking for missing persons or whatever. They will put a call out to the RFS and SES and quite often we will do that, so those are other things. I think it is probably a large part of marketing, but it is also that RFS has its own brand but to some extent that has been subsumed within the brand of ESA. I think it is important that these are all discrete services: ACTAS, Fire and Rescue, RFS and SES. Even though we have that nice umbrella of ESA, we also need to promote the brands of each of those individual services to attract people but then look at how we are going to keep those people engaged. If we are not fighting fires, what else can the volunteers be doing? They are driven, at heart, by a desire to help the community, and that help might not come in the form of fighting fires; it might be something else.

I think part of it is around managing expectations of volunteers when they come in so that they do not think they are immediately going to be out there fighting fires or going to dramatic scenes; sometimes they might be. It is the nature of what we do that is very unpredictable, so it is very hard to plan around those sorts of things. We do not know when the next big bushfire or the big natural disaster is going to come, but we need to have that preparedness to be able to respond when it does happen. We need to be mindful of that and not find ourselves at some point in the future with a huge need for volunteers and not having any trained volunteers and having to rely on that idea of spontaneous volunteering, which carries its own risk because those people are not trained. It is very good that you put your hand up to volunteer, but if you do not have the training and you do not have the experience, then that also represents a risk to the community not only in respect of saving lives but also in respect of putting volunteer lives at risk—even though they are coming from a very good place, they may not understand the risks that are inherent in the work. That is part of the education you get when you are a volunteer so that you know what the risks are and when you are volunteering you are coming from a more informed place. I think that that is important as well.

**MR COCKS:** Ms Clay mentioned earlier the very high proportion, comparatively, of new Canberrans in some of our new suburbs around the fringes of Canberra. Are you able to tell me if the volunteering community is a strong reflection of that distribution as well?

**Dr Ballard:** Is it diverse—the volunteering community?

**MR COCKS:** Yes, or are there opportunities to better tap into new Canberrans?

**Dr Ballard:** I am sure that there are opportunities to better tap into different communities. The RFS, I think, is very diverse. Our percentage of females in the RFS would be considerably higher than what it is in the career firefighting service. Each brigade has very much its own culture, but you see a lot of intergenerational

firefighters. At our brigade we have a father and a daughter, a father and a son, and a mother and a daughter. That is something that I used to see when I worked in Tasmania with the ambulance service as well, so people stay. There is something there, I think, about retention and some work that could be done, but the Rural Fire Service is quite diverse and quite welcoming of different people from different groups.

We do a lot of community education, but I think there are still other ways we can connect with the diverse communities we have in the ACT and do more work around that. We do a lot of community education where we go to different schools, and we do education around that and a lot of the different events that are held in Canberra. We will take a fire truck and we will take our volunteers and talk to the community, but there are always ways that we can do that better.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Any further questions?

**MS CLAY:** Yes, I have. We have not heard a lot about time-of-use tariffs, and I was interested that that was one of the issues raised in your submission. It goes in with batteries, but it goes to the issue of how much people pay for electricity and the policy lever that can help people reduce energy usage. Can you run me through how you think the ACT could be using that tool? What is that tool and how could we be using it better?

**Ms Holmes:** Yes, absolutely. The point of the time of use is that in the expensive time of the night, when there is high demand and electricity prices are high, time-of-use prices act as a signal. That is how we keep tying it back into the EV. It does not necessarily need to be with the EV; we are, ourselves, tying it to that. It is a price signal for consumers to respond, so it is a way to stabilise the grid. It is also a way to support the grid for times when there is an over-demand on the grid and there are households that can produce excess energy. The price signal would be that prices are high and if you produce excess solar back to the grid, you will get a rebate. Then in reverse as well—so, do not use your energy now. Households can use it, essentially, to do that and react with a price signal, so it is a way to strengthen the economy, in a way. Our argument is there is a long-term effect of reducing household bills; it gives greater cost-of-living equitability to low income households, who are struggling to pay their energy bills.

**MS CLAY:** For a renter to be able to access that, does it require a landlord to implement anything?

**Ms Holmes:** The issue with that is the renter's ability to be able to install all the CER assets that consume energy resources. Once they are installed, then, yes, that would be accessible, but that is another policy implementation that we are working on. We consider them a vulnerable group.

**MS CLAY:** Yes, interesting. The ACT is not using this at all at the moment?

**Ms Holmes:** I do not believe so. I would have to look into that. Sorry, there are a lot of states I have been working with, but, no, I do not believe so.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you.

**MR COCKS:** It sounds like at the heart of some your proposals is locating PV systems at house and community level rather than large scale generation. Can you talk for a minute about the infrastructure impact there? I understand there are difficulties in terms of getting power going out from rooftop solar to other homes in terms of the capacity of the system to do that.

**Ms Holmes:** I cannot give you exact technical expertise on that; it is my boss who is an expert electrician. But I can give you the high-level view of that. The infrastructure we are trying to implement government support for in terms of updating policy regulation—and we have just responded to the AEMC and AEMO’s consultation on this—is a two-way infrastructure network. Whilst you would not necessarily be producing energy to your neighbour, for example, it would be supplied through the energy grid time-of-issue-tariff type price signal response. It all ties back into that.

**MR COCKS:** My understanding is there are limitations in terms of the grid’s capacity to deliver that two-way exchange at the moment.

**Ms Holmes:** At this stage, yes.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I would like to thank you both for your time today. It was quite a diverse hearing. Thank you for your patience and for your submissions today.

**Ms Holmes:** Thank you.

**Dr Ballard:** Thank you.

**Short suspension.**

**STEWART, DR ERIN**, Policy, Advocacy and Media Manager, Mental Health Community Coalition ACT

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome our next witness, Dr Stewart from the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT. I remind the witness of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink statement on the table. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Please confirm for the record that you understand the implications of that statement.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes. I understand.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you speak to how important just transition is to the mental health of our community?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes. I think one of the points we were trying to emphasise in the submission is that mental health and climate change are really locked into one another. We can see that more frequent, intense weather events and natural disasters obviously lead to stress, distress and climate anxiety in the face of these risks, but also trauma as we experience them, for instance, during bushfires and that kind of thing.

We also know that the people most at risk are often people who are not in privileged positions as they do not have as many resources to cope with the impacts of climate change. We also know, on top of that, people with existing mental health conditions bear more of the brunt of disasters and similar climate change related events. For example, heatwaves can trigger symptoms of mania for people with bipolar disorder. Heatwaves can exacerbate anxiety and depression. As well, there is an association between heatwaves and increased suicide risk. We have also seen in the data that about a third of people who die in heatwaves are people with existing complex mental ill health issues.

People with mental illness are a vulnerable community when it comes to climate change, but also people with existing vulnerabilities, whether or not they have mental ill health, are also at risk of some of those traumatic, anxiety and provoking impacts; particularly with the cost-of-living crisis that is being exacerbated by an energy crisis. This is another area where we are seeing greater distress in the community and greater need for services.

**THE CHAIR:** In your submission, you quote the Commissioner for Sustainability and Environment when she said that: “Connected communities are adaptable communities.” We have heard a lot today around housing and transport, and how these things, like housing density, are really important as we go forward. From your perspective, do densified housing, greater access to transport routes and those things contribute positively to the mental health of our community?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes, definitely. The research is a bit equivocal, from my perspective, on what level of density is correct. Super ultra-high density can actually be quite stressful for people. If they are living around a lot of people, and say, if there are dark

stairwells and that kind of thing, that can be anxiety inducing. But a level of density where you are connected to other people in the community and you can walk or get public transport to things that you need to do to get around your day-to-day life limits exclusion or barriers to participation. In addition, things like strong public transport links take some pressure off the climate because we are using mass transportation and more sustainable methods of getting around than the car-centric approach that we have now.

On top of that, having environments where people can congregate outside because there is tree cover and parks—all the green space is really good for people's mental health for multiple reasons. It allows people to talk to one another, but also green space itself and being out in nature can be a really good restorative for mental health, as I am sure a lot of us know firsthand.

Then there are ongoing effects from having tree coverage. For example, in a lot of suburbs there might not be a lot of coverage, so the sun goes right through the windows creating quite a lot of hostility and heat in the environment. This means there is more reliance on being indoors or having air conditioning going and that kind of thing, which also exacerbates climate change. There are all these connections here between community, our environment, and our ability to both adapt to and mitigate climate impacts of our lifestyles. So yes.

**MS CLAY:** Thank you for coming in. I was fascinated and alarmed to read some of the statistics in your submission. You have a figure in here, around 2 per cent of deaths in Australia are associated with heatwaves.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** So that is one in 50 deaths are associated with heatwaves—jump in in a second, just let me finish the very alarming thought—and that more than 60 per cent of those deaths occur in under-privileged communities. So that is one in 25 deaths in Australia, in certain communities, are associated with heatwaves. Is that the state of our research at the moment?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes. One of the issues we have with investigating heatwave deaths is that when people, say, go into the hospital during a heatwave, they often will have a pre-existing condition. So the cause of death will be recorded as that pre-existing condition when really the heatwave has exacerbated it. If you look at coronial records, I think there are 300 deaths and 7,000 hospitalisations over a decade in Australia. There is additional research, which I believe came out of the ANU, which estimates that heatwaves contributed to 36,000 deaths within that ten year timeframe. That is a huge number of deaths.

**MS CLAY:** It is enormous.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** It makes sense to me. If somebody dies of a heart attack, of course, the cause of death on their death certificate is heart attack. If they would not have had the heart attack but for the 45 degree heatwave, it is strongly associated with a heatwave.



**Dr Stewart:** Of the 300 deaths on the coronial record, I do not believe any were recorded in the ACT. So it is really hard to know what the situation is here. You can probably make some good estimates and talk to researchers who can probably make better estimates. Yes, it is a really serious concern, and it has not had very much attention at all, at any level of government.

There is no heatwave strategy. Heatwaves are a huge part of what it is to be Australian. We all know what they are like. We all go through them. They wreak an incredible amount of havoc and danger, but we do not have the systems in place to see that. Indeed, the heatwave itself might not be visible because it is not like a bushfire that causes a tremendous amount of destruction that is clearly visible.

**MS CLAY:** Interesting. The mental health cost is probably even harder to put your finger on than the direct health cost because mental health impacts are also hard to measure, right?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes. There has been some research by the Victorian EPA and the University of Adelaide looking at the mental health impacts of climate events. We have been measuring certain health impacts, things like high rates of heart disease, but mental health has tended to be excluded from that. It is quite promising that people are looking into this, and I think it would be great for the ACT to also look into this.

**MS CLAY:** Again, it is probably layers of problems for certain members of our community because we also have higher rates of health problems and mental health problems in certain groups of the community, and if those are the same people who are at higher risk during heatwaves, it is probably all compounding for certain groups in our community, right?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes. We know, for example, that people who are very isolated, who might not be living with anyone, might not have anyone checking in on them, say, if it is a really hot day. On top of that, they might be in older housing or poorer housing conditions, so they are getting more of the heat. People who live with complex mental illness, especially as they get older, often also have physical disabilities. All those things create a situation of a lot of compounded vulnerability.

**MR COCKS:** In your submission, you talk a bit about investing in the capacity of community mental health.

**Dr Stewart:** Yes.

**MR COCKS:** This seems to be quite sensible, in terms of having an ability to respond as the impact of mental health conditions seems to be more intensive than it was a few years ago. How do you see the current state of community mental health services in the ACT? Is there enough investment now? Does something need to change?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes, I think something does need to change. Obviously with COVID, the pressure on the mental health system in general, including the community mental health system, was enormous. While we are now post-COVID, we are in a cost of

living situation, which is causing a lot of demand on services.

I know Care, which looks after financial counselling and that kind of thing for members of the community, are reporting a 30 per cent increase in demand. Lifeline is reporting an increase in demand related to financial issues. Vinnies, the YWCA and other services like community pantries or soup kitchens are also noticing an increase in demand.

So we have a situation where the status quo already is that the system is under a lot of pressure. If you added in a disaster, I think it would strain. It would be a real challenge. There are lots of reasons why that is a pity, but the community mental health system is really quite agile and adaptable to individual circumstances.

Some of the services that get delivered are things like befriending schemes, where say, a volunteer will go over to someone's house and make sure they are okay. Those sorts of things can be very useful and I can see how they would be useful in a disaster scenario, but with the state of things as they are currently, I cannot see how all that talent and experience can be leveraged as well as it could be.

**MR COCKS:** So it sounds like things are already stretched, and if something happens, there is not really the slack in the system to respond?

**Dr Stewart:** Yes, there is probably no slack in the system.

**MR COCKS:** It might be useful if you talk a little bit about what the community mental health sector looks like, compared with what people might be more familiar with in terms of treatment services?

**Dr Stewart:** Of course. I guess a lot of people when they think of mental health services might think of going into a hospital ward, talking to a private psychologist or a psychiatrist, maybe getting medication and maybe some counselling. The community mental health sector does include some of those clinical services but it also includes things like support groups and social work type capacities where you are connected with services that help you alleviate some of the distress that is going on in your life. So for instance, you could be connected up with a cleaning service, childcare or that kind of thing, which would enable you to get a break or to do other things that you need to do to stay well. We can help people enter into and retain employment. It is essentially about helping people to survive and thrive in the community they are already in and to build up the supports around them, rather than sending them elsewhere. Ultimately, the hope is that they have those supports in place so ideally they would need fewer interventions within the mental health system. It can work for people at all different levels of severity of mental ill health. So all the way from early intervention—talking to children in schools about their mental health—to things like recovery and rehabilitation after a hospital stay, or to prevent a hospital stay. It is a huge, moving sector, and different organisations do different things.

**MR COCKS:** They are not usually the sorts of services provided by the government, are they?

**Dr Stewart:** No. We do not really replicate anything that the government does,

although definitely, members will work closely with public mental health services.

**THE CHAIR:** We have had a lot of emergencies over the past few years, relating to lots of different weather and COVID. Has there been work done on preventative mental health strategies, or community resilience? So prior to a disaster, or prior to the fire season, is there work done to educate and prepare the community?

**Dr Stewart:** One example I know of, and I have actually participated in myself, is person-centred disaster preparedness. I cannot remember the name of the organisation it is offered by, but it is a disability organisation in Queensland. It takes people with disability through planning firstly what their general needs are, like on a day-to-day basis, and then how they would be able to access those things during a disaster. It can be quite empowering for people to understand the nuances of that and to think about how they can put in supports to do that. I think it is a really great program.

On top of that, I think we also need to have good training for first responders and other community workers around what some of the needs that might pop up are. If you were evacuating someone and they required an insulin pump or that kind of thing, how could we make sure that will continue working, because that is going to be very important for people.

In terms of mental health, we know that a lot of evacuation centres can be quite overstimulating. They can be quite stressful and anxious environments. Having people there who can talk them through it and having a quiet space available and those sorts of things can be helpful. They sound like nice-to-haves, but for some people they would be a lifeline. It would change their experience of disaster and allow them the space to recover from the traumatic event.

So I think it is a mixture of individuals having a responsibility—not just people with disabilities and people with mental ill-health, but all people have a responsibility—to have a think about what they need to do to prepare for an emergency situation and what things they need to have in place to deal with that safely. As well, I think at a systemic level, we need strategies, training and thinking around how do we accessibly include everyone in our disaster planning and actual disaster responses.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much for your time today and thank you for your submission.

**Dr Stewart:** Thanks.

**Short suspension.**

**RATTENBURY, MR SHANE**, Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Minister for Gaming  
**MALOUF, MS ROS**, Executive Branch Manager, Climate Change and Energy Programs, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate  
**WRIGHT, MS FIONA**, Acting Deputy Director-General, Water and Emissions Reduction, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate  
**LAWTON, MR KIERAN**, Acting Executive Group Manager, Climate Change and Energy, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome, from the ACT government, Minister Shane Rattenbury, Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction, and officials. Could everyone please agree that you have read and understood the implications of the privilege statement.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**Ms Malouf:** Yes.

**Ms Wright:** Yes.

**Mr Lawton:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Fantastic. Minister, I want to chat about EV charging stations. I have two newer communities, in Phillip and in Molonglo Valley, that are desperate for EV charging. I got a letter back from you a few weeks ago about the EV program, saying that applications were currently under assessment and that successful applications would be announced in the coming weeks. I am just wondering where that is all up to.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have not yet had a final answer from the directorate on that assessment process. I am afraid I am not able to give you an update, but I think we have made good progress under the first round of applications. We have certainly seen a significant increase in the number of EV charging points across the city. That is at both the mid-range speeds, seven and 22 kilowatts, and the high end. We have quite a large bank of six at the Mint car park in Deakin, close to some of those areas. Certainly, I have used that one. It has been very popular. Because there are six charging points there, it gives people real confidence that they will be able to get on when they get there. That is a model we are looking at again for the future.

**THE CHAIR:** How are the sites distributed and how is all that worked out to ensure that it is equally distributed?

**Mr Rattenbury:** There are a range of factors being taken into account. They include the availability of electricity infrastructure; partners—whether it is a government car park or a private car park and the relationship there; and where the proponents are seeking to go.

I think one of the lessons from the first round is that the government has been much more proactive in working with potential proponents to identify sites because of both the availability of government car parks and our understanding of the electricity

network. In the first round we probably lost a little bit of time in that there was some uncertainty about those factors, so we have been much more proactive in providing that information in the second round.

**THE CHAIR:** Many of the apartment buildings in Woden have been built without charging infrastructure. People want to transition but they cannot access a charger. Given that thousands of people have now moved into the Woden town centre that are needing EV charging, is priority being given to higher density areas or to addressing that problem?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. Probably this goes to your previous question as well. There certainly is an emphasis on thinking about the geographic distribution to make sure that there is a good spread across Canberra. Those high-density areas, from government's point of view, are really important and strategic. From a proponent's point of view it is more commercial because I think they will see a greater use case, potentially more customers in those areas. But, yes, we accept that that is a priority: both Belconnen and Woden town centres.

**THE CHAIR:** Great. Thanks.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, this is a just transition inquiry. We did not mention transport in the terms of reference, and it is quite interesting that most of our witnesses have talked about transport, either in their submissions or in evidence today. We have heard quite a lot about public and active transport and the need for it. We have heard today from Greater Canberra, ACTCOSS and Pedal Power, and it was also in the Mental Health Community Coalition submission. Do you have any concerns about how we are doing transport, either from an emissions reduction point of view or from a just transitions point of view?

**Mr Rattenbury:** From an emissions reduction point of view it is fair to reflect that it remains our biggest challenge, in the sense that transport is now 63-ish per cent of our ground-based transport emissions. Clearly, it is far and away our biggest sector. The answer for that is multifaceted, in the sense that we need to improve our walking and cycling infrastructure, we need to improve public transport and we need to make our transport fleet zero emissions. Generally, at the moment, that is going to be electric. Hydrogen will play some part, I think, but probably in the heavier transport. That is, in broad terms, the answer. There is a lot to encompass within that, so I am happy to be guided by you as to where you want to go.

**MS CLAY:** Sure; thank you. Quite a lot of our witnesses have talked about where government is putting its money. We have had evidence from various witnesses that we are spending a lot of money on private vehicles and roads and that government is not spending as much money on public transport, public infrastructure and active travel infrastructure. Have you seen any concerns in that area?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think that reflects a historical pattern.

**MS CLAY:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Undoubtedly, the ACT has, over many decades now, placed great

emphasis on car mobility. In the debate we see about the relative costs of transport modes there is a lot of discussion about the cost of light rail and of various public transport options. I think people do not pay as much attention to the significant cost of road upgrades and the like, and the ongoing maintenance. That is a debate that is out there to be had. But if we are talking about a just transition, we need to be very mindful of the cost of the private motor vehicle. Whether that is a traditional petrol vehicle or a modern electric vehicle, they are expensive to run. The NRMA estimates the cost, depending on where you live and all those sorts of things, at \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year.

**MS CLAY:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** You have rego and insurance and depreciation—all of those things. I think it is important that people are given a choice and that there are good alternatives to simply having to have a private car. From a just transition point of view, having good alternatives and enabling people to access them is very important.

**MS CLAY:** Interesting. ACTCOSS said something very similar, in fact.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I did not listen this morning, I am afraid.

**MS CLAY:** Dr Bowles told us that he lives in the inner north and he would love to see more people be able to run one-car households. He actually thought that was part of the just transition. He also spoke a bit about e-bikes. He was quite puzzled as to why the government is not supporting e-bikes in the same way that government is supporting electric vehicles and, I understand, electric motorbikes. He seemed to think that they were quite transformative. A few of our other witnesses thought that too. Do you think e-bikes could be better supported?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I certainly think e-bikes can play a big part, in the sense that they open up options for people who might not be able to cycle otherwise—for example, if you are feeling less fit, less able, or live a bit further away. I have had experience of this with staff who have worked with me who lived 15 to 18 kilometres from the workplace. An e-bike opened up that up to them, made them able to cycle when they felt they were not fit enough otherwise. I think it is really important.

At the moment the key supports offered by government in the transport space for EVs are stamp duty exemption, two years of free rego and access to the \$15,000 interest-free loan, which generally will cover the price premium between a standard petrol vehicle and an electric vehicle. That is what is on offer. E-motorbikes are also accessible under the Sustainable Household Scheme. E-bikes are not, and that has been the subject of a number of discussions in the Assembly.

**MS CLAY:** Dr Bowles seemed to think that it might be useful, from a just transition point of view, to support e-bikes, because they would be available to people who cannot afford electric motorbikes and electric cars. He also put up the argument that it would probably be better value for government because they are cheaper. Have you thought about those issues at all?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have certainly thought about them. I think the point about them

being more accessible is accurate. You can get a decent e-bike for \$1,500 or \$2,000, compared to having to go out and buy a second car for your household. It would clearly be a lot more accessible for a lot of people. There are two issues. One is the access to the actual e-bikes themselves, and then there is having the supporting infrastructure to go with them. I think that is probably even more important. That is the thing government probably should be more focused on. I reckon a lot more people would get themselves an e-bike, but the government has to build the infrastructure.

**MS CLAY:** A lot of witnesses talked about the need for better active travel infrastructure as part of the just transition. A number of witnesses did not think government was doing that well enough or fast enough. I do not know if that is within your field or outside of it, but I would love you to comment if it is within it.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I have opinions, but it really sits with Ministers Steele and Cheyne and their portfolios. If the committee wants to delve into that, it is probably better to ask them for the details.

**MS CLAY:** Fair enough.

**MR COCKS:** Until this inquiry was suggested, I have to admit that the phrase “just transition” was not something anyone had raised with me at a doorstep.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Sure.

**MR COCKS:** It was not something that people were talking to me about. It was not something I was particularly across, and it does not seem like I have heard a strong, consistent view of what the phrase “just transition” means. I wonder, could you tell me: to you, what does “just transition” mean?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think it is a fair point, Mr Cocks. I do not think it is a term that is commonly understood in the community, but I think people intuitively understand what it is—and this goes to the heart of your question—which is the idea that there is a transition coming. Plenty of people will make it themselves, in the sense that people who have got the means and the income, when they upgrade their house, will just electrify or will just transition across to an electric vehicle next time they purchase one because they see that as the future.

For me, it is about making sure that those on lower incomes are not left behind in the transition, are not trapped into systems that are becoming more expensive and are able to take advantage of the opportunities that come from the transition. For example, we know that a house that has solar can reduce its annual energy bill by around \$1,000, depending on the size of the system and the size of the household. Electric households are cheaper to run. Electric vehicles have lower running costs. But if you cannot afford to make that transition, you cannot take advantage of those opportunities.

The negative and worrying side of the just transition equation is—and we speak of it in the government submission—what is called the death spiral of the gas network. There are lots of people transitioning themselves across to being all electric. There are a smaller number of gas customers who have to pay for the same amount of gas infrastructure, and so the cost per customer goes up. If you are not wealthy enough to

transition your house to being an all-electric house and you have got to stay on the gas network, you are going to wear a bigger cost over time. That was a longer answer, but hopefully that sort of—

**MR COCKS:** It is useful. I will say that there have certainly been some additional aspects that have been brought up. The intergenerational impact was one of the ones we heard about earlier, as well as the additional burdens placed on volunteers and things like that. But what I am interested in coming to is: in this whole picture, we have multiple ministers responsible for climate and environment. What is your role in terms of climate and a just transition versus the role of the Chief Minister, who holds a pretty closely related portfolio?

**Mr Rattenbury:** What I can say is that—

**MR COCKS:** I hope this is something that is fairly clear.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, it is. It is fairly clear. Dealing with climate change is obviously an enormous and complex issue, so it does cut across a lot of portfolios. When we put the last climate strategy through, every government directorate had input into and a role in the climate strategy. That is why you see a lot of ministers, because it impacts in each portfolio. That is part of it.

In terms of your very specific question on water, energy and emissions reduction, it is laid out in the administrative arrangements. I have particular responsibility for energy policy. I am sure we will come to talk about the integrated energy plan, but, for example, I have a leading role in that, in partnership with the Chief Minister.

**MR COCKS:** Your role does not really go, though, to the economics and the incentives built into the budget around things that are not directly related to emissions and energy?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly, I bring forward a number of business cases around the programs we run to support transition for community members or for businesses. Yes.

**MR COCKS:** But, for example, the incentives around electric vehicles?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I brought the business case for that, for example. Yes.

**MR COCKS:** Does the administration for that sit with you entirely?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. The agency runs that.

**MR COCKS:** Have you undertaken any investigation into the distribution across different income brackets of where those incentives land?

**Mr Rattenbury:** For EVs specifically?

**MR COCKS:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** This is a really problematic area of policy. I imagine ACTCOSS



made this point this morning; I have certainly had that conversation with them. Electric vehicles continue to be expensive. There are not models available for people who are looking for a \$10,000, \$15,000 or \$20,000 car. There are just not. Actually, no; that is not true. You can get a \$20,000, second-hand Nissan Leaf, and with an ACT government interest-free loan of \$15,000 it is actually pretty accessible. But that is a certain group of people who want that type of car.

I think one of the areas that is problematic from a just transition point of view is that EVs continue to remain relatively expensive. Certainly, from a government point of view, that is why we have focused on electrifying our fleet. Firstly, it is because I think government has a responsibility to cut its own emissions. Secondly, knowing that government vehicles are on lease, conscious of that, we will drive a better second-hand market sooner because those vehicles will become available for people at a depreciated price.

We have looked around the world and we have spoken with experts from a range of countries. Nobody yet has really cracked how you do more accessible EVs, other than creating higher demand and having more models come to market. We are now starting to see that in Australia. With an improved uptake of EVs, we are getting cheaper models that are now coming in under \$40,000. Only two years ago you could not have bought a \$40,000 EV anywhere in Australia, except a second-hand one.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We have talked a lot about just transition, equity of transition, and different groups in the community being potentially left behind. What concerns me is that different parts of Canberra are also getting left behind. We see the benefit of light rail and the development along the northern corridor and the cyclepaths. The CEO of ACTCOSS was saying how in Lyneham the community is working really closely with the government to get some tweaks on the bike path so that it is really accessible and great.

When you look at Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and Woden you are talking about not just tweaks to a system; you need really serious investment to bring the system up. You do not have those corridors; you do not have light rail yet. It concerns me that there is not equality in investment but also that different parts, like Tuggeranong, have different issues. An e-bike may not be such a relevant switch for someone who lives that far out and works in the city. How diverse are our policies and what ability do our transition policies have to be really flexible to different parts of our community?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think your point is fundamentally an important one. As a general observation, government has, to my mind, a central role in making sure that the transition is just, in thinking about what are the pockets of our community who are the people who are being left behind or missing out or do not have the knowledge, do not have the skills. All of those questions sit in that. It goes back to Mr Cocks's question of what is a just transition. There are many facets we need to look at.

It is probably fair to reflect that different parts of the city are responding in different ways. EV uptake is distributed in different ways across the city. Tuggeranong is further out, but, for example, the old parts of Canberra have poor streetlighting

because of their age, whereas newer parts of Canberra have much better streetlighting even though they are further out. There are a range of different examples of how different geographic areas are benefiting.

Yes, we need to roll light rail out faster to give more people access to it and to share those benefits. It is something we need to be mindful of. Certainly, if you look at the government programs—and there are a lot of them outlined in the submission—they are available to all Canberrans. We see terrific uptake across the city. On things like the solar uptake, Belconnen and parts of Tuggeranong are the strongest areas of uptake, if I remember the figures correctly. We have got programs for renters; we have got programs for home owners. You will see a different uptake in different areas.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it worth having targeted incentives or are we just too small? For example, there was a news report recently that was saying that on the outskirts of Sydney people who live further out are transitioning to EVs faster because it reduces petrol costs. The household scheme has restricted criteria for access. Are there thoughts around, for example, people in Tuggeranong getting greater access to subsidies on EVs than people in the inner north? Are there any moves to geographically target incentives?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, the focus has not really been geographic; it has been much more of an income focus, certainly from my perspective. The thinking we are doing about the Integrated Energy Plan, which is the next big phase of energy policy, is very much focused on income. Even if you look at something like the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme, where there has been a priority household target for a number of years now—again, that is income focused. It is about using income as a proxy for need; I think that would be the best way to describe it. Probably the key geographic thing is the one you touched on earlier, which is making sure we get a good spread of EV charging across the city. That is probably the number one geographic issue we have got at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MS CLAY:** In the Integrated Energy Plan position paper, support was proposed to help those with the least capacity to upgrade their homes and to target some of the other areas that are having trouble electrifying. Can you talk me through that and tell me if it is working?

**Mr Rattenbury:** The discussion paper went out last year. We had a round of community consultation. Certainly, the notion of a just transition and supporting the households who need it most was highly prioritised by the community in their feedback. Again, to your earlier question, there was a strong understanding from the community that there is a particular role for government in making sure the households that are least able to make the transition are more targeted by support; that came through very strongly. The Integrated Energy Plan is just being finalised at the moment, and it will be released in the next month or so. That will be reflected strongly in there, but there are still some of the final details being sorted out based on the feedback that came in. Does that—

**MS CLAY:** It sort of gets there. We have had a number of witnesses talk about the

market failure we have where we are providing a lot of help to home owners, and it is in some ways easier to help home owners than to help people who are not home owners, but I did notice we have a long list of programs in the government's submission. Can you tell me which of these are helping people who are not home owners and those people, maybe, who are not needing so much help right now?

**Mr Rattenbury:** We have a few. I will ask Ms Malouf, but the first observation I make is, certainly from a regulatory point of view, it is a program design that the regulation to require minimum energy performance standards for rental properties, which is the one that mandates a level 5 of ceiling insulation, figures a regulatory response to that point you make, because there is clearly a market failure there. It is a classic case of the split incentive, where a tenant benefits from the insulation upgrade and the landlord has to pay for it. To me, that is a classic example of market failure and why it was essential that government stepped in and put a regulatory response in place. In terms of our programs, Ms Malouf?

**Ms Malouf:** In addition to the regulatory ones—which are the EEIS and the minimum standard, which have made a big difference to those householders, both with energy efficiency and the insulation—the SHS is available to renters, and, mostly, we are seeing that is being taken up in the EV space by renters, but that is still a program.

There is also a renters' program, and that program is available both as an online program and a program where you can get an in-home assessment; that is an energy program. It is an online tool where people can help themselves when they want to—10 o'clock at night or 6 o'clock in the morning, not when people are available to come up into their house—or they can get an in-home assessment. That energy assessment will align what you can do in the ACT in relation to tenancy laws and helps you with your energy efficiency. We have had hundreds go through that program, and it is quite popular, both online and the in-home assessments.

In addition to that, in the low income space we look after the households who are in St Vincent de Paul programs. We contract St Vincent de Paul to go into homes and do a home energy assessment. That home energy assessment is tailored to each household on how they operate during the day, how many rooms they use, the number of people in the house and how to maximise the energy use in the house. Again, that program has been running for years. They are mostly renters. In addition to that, we have our program where we are installing efficiency upgrades and insulation into Housing ACT properties. We have done 600 of those in the first phase, and we will do another 600 before June 30 this year. There will be some electrification and insulation as well.

**MS CLAY:** You mentioned the regulation about installing insulation.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**MS CLAY:** That came up this morning too, and a question was put to ACTCOSS: "Wouldn't that make landlords leave the market because it would be too difficult and expensive to be a landlord here?" The answer came back that ACTCOSS had not seen the evidence for that happening. I am just wondering: have you seen the evidence for that happening?

**Mr Rattenbury:** No, we have not seen any evidence of that. There is no data, Ms Malouf, in terms of the program?

**Ms Malouf:** We are collecting some data at the moment, which we have not finalised yet. That data is focused on a few questions; one of them being, “Did rents go up?” based on the installation of insulation, and that has not been the case. That report will be fully available very shortly. There are some good outcomes for things that were expected to happen that actually have not happened.

**MS CLAY:** Interesting; thank you.

**MR COCKS:** Supplementary to that, can you tell me how much it would cost to insulate a three bedroom home, on average, with R5 insulation?

**Ms Malouf:** Yes. This is one of those “depends on”, so I will have a few caveats around this, if that is okay—

**MR COCKS:** An indicative number would be fine.

**Ms Malouf:** With the electricals we need to do an electrical safety check, making sure that the electricals that sit under the insulation are working out. There is a price range of anywhere between about \$5,000 and \$6,000, I would say, for a three bedroom home, if it is going from no insulation. Some of the caveats are taking out old insulation or topping up other insulation and then any electrical works that need to be done to ensure the safety, because all of them are done with an electrical inspection first, under our programs.

**MR COCKS:** That \$5,000 or \$6,000—does that include the electrical inspection cost?

**Ms Malouf:** It does, yes, but, depending on the works, it may or may not include the works as well. If it has got to be switchboard upgrades, it would not include them, but if it has got some lighting changes, to the downlights for instance, then that can be done potentially within those upgrades.

**MR COCKS:** Okay, and I understand that wiring upgrades would be necessary particularly for some older houses, which have the old-style wiring, in order to be safe?

**Ms Malouf:** Some—it is not always older houses, which is a little bit interesting.

**MR COCKS:** Pre 1996 is when the standards came in, I understand.

**Ms Malouf:** Correct. With those upgrades and the wiring, a lot of them are just the lighting and the type of lighting, especially in the downlight space.

**MR COCKS:** Yes. Who does bear the cost of that in a private rental situation?

**Ms Malouf:** If it is to meet the standard, it would be the landlord.

**MR COCKS:** And why would a landlord not pass the cost on to their tenant through higher rents?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I offer two thoughts. First of all, the government has made the Sustainable Household Scheme loans available to landlords, so they can do it with zero up-front cost. And, of course, it will be tax deductible and there is a range of other benefits available to landlords which will certainly help minimise the cost of that. In terms of direct impact on rentals, and I am sure others would have a view on this, I think most people recognise that the rental price of a property is much more about what the market is dictating rather than an exact cost base for the landlord. Landlords will charge what they can get.

**MR COCKS:** An important issue that came up in our hearings this afternoon is the electrical grid infrastructure, and, in particular, as we increase the volume of rooftop solar, which has great advantages in terms of electricity production close to the place of consumption. But I understand there are limits on how well the existing infrastructure can transmit power back up the line into the grid from that rooftop solar. Can you explain to me where we are at with overcoming those barriers?

**Mr Rattenbury:** I will ask Ms Wright to jump in; this is her particular area of expertise.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**Ms Wright:** Thank you. I think the answer is that the grid is totally capable of transmitting electrons either way; it is more the design of the grid. At the household level it is a smaller wire so less able to transmit large amounts of electricity. The answer to “How are we going?” is that I think part of it is the physical upgrade and how smart the network is in terms of what sensors are out there to observe and monitor the amount of production at any time. There is also a lot of work going into how network businesses and retailers design their tariffs to, basically, influence consumer behaviours, so things such as tariffs that encourage people to use their electricity in the middle of the day, where they can, at a time when solar is producing so that there is less net energy feeding back into the grid. It is a combination of physical infrastructure upgrades—for which the network businesses put in their bids to the economic regulator, the AER, to talk about what upgrades are needed over the forward period—as well as making sure the network is smart and can be orchestrated and then the behaviour changes that are needed. All of those things are running in parallel at the moment.

**MR COCKS:** Putting aside the business model side of the equation, do we have a picture of what the technical state of the ACT network is now?

**Ms Wright:** Yes. For the electricity network, every year they put forward a planning report, which is publicly available, and they talk about the capacity and the ability of the network. There are also technical standards that are in place that talk about what the limits are for solar production of individual households. They are all publicly available.

**MR COCKS:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is in respect of the Integrated Energy Plan consultation report, the YourSay report.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Respondents were asked: “How supportive are you of the ACT government’s transition to a 100 per cent renewable energy supply to electrify our households, businesses, transport and city infrastructure?” Forty-six per cent were very supportive; however, 28 per cent were very unsupportive.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Do you know why? What is the profile of the people who are unsupportive, and how do we bring them along on the journey?

**Mr Rattenbury:** My colleagues will probably come in with some additional data in a moment, but I think it is fair to reflect that there are a couple of areas of resistance or concern; I think it is a spectrum of those things. Some people prefer that we maintain a range of fuel sources for a range of reasons: choice, resilience and the like. There are those who perhaps are just concerned about the cost and the process of change. They are the sorts of key pieces of feedback I have heard in discussions with the community. They are probably the two key themes. I do not know whether we have any sort of demographics or further detail?

**Ms Wright:** I am just trying to see if I can find some quick further detail.

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

**Ms Wright:** Yes, I think we can take it on notice unless—

**Mr Rattenbury:** There is some breakdown in the data that has come through, so let us take that on notice and send it to the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Does that sharpen the focus, in terms of the plan and where we go, to educate with policies that are designed to support the community broadly? Does it inspire us to do better?

**Ms Wright:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly.

**Ms Wright:** I can probably add a couple of things; sorry, I was fixated on trying to find a particular piece of data. What we can say is that through this next phase we do want the consumers to lead their own transition and to make choices about upgrading their appliances at a time that is right for them. It is really important that we educate and provide the community with the tools that they need. We do have the Make Your Next Choice Electric tool, which is something that is available online, so that the community can talk about their own specific circumstances and come up with a plan

to, over time, upgrade their appliances.

In getting ready for this next Make Your Next Choice Electric campaign, we surveyed the community. We found that those that are aware of the government's plan to phase out gas are far more likely to have already taken action themselves and when an appliance has come to end of life to have already taken action to replace it. I think it really emphasises that certainty of the plan and awareness of the plan means that people are enabled to make those choices when the time is right for them.

**Mr Rattenbury:** If I can just—

**MR COCKS:** A supplementary question on that. Can I ask how many people were not aware of the plan, or what proportion?

**Ms Wright:** Let me do a quick summary here. I have got, "Those who are aware of the government plan are more likely to have made the replacement." I do not have that particular number, sorry Mr Cocks.

**MR COCKS:** Could you take it on notice.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Let us check if we have it. We will bring it on notice.

**Ms Wright:** Yes.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Just on your earlier point, Dr Paterson, which does speak to this question as well, there is definitely an education piece that still needs to be done, I think. A lot of people are aware of it. I think the fact is the government has given a really clear time line and been very definitive about where we are going. An important part of that is it is a longish time line so that people have a chance to get used to it and learn about it and the like.

But there is no doubt that for many years people in Canberra people were told that fossil fuel gas was a clean and cheap alternative. We got lots of advertising from ActewAGL telling us this, so it is fair to reflect that some people in the community are saying, "Well, hang on a second, it wasn't that long ago I was being told to connect to gas." I understand why people are frustrated about that. My answer to that usually is, "That is true, but we've now learnt some new things and we have to go in a different direction." An important part of it, I think, as a just transition, is saying to people, "We can do this over time." Our key advice to people is, "Don't go out and pull out a device that is perfectly good that you have only just paid for. Do it at the end of life, because at that point you have to buy a new device anyway. Just buy an electric one rather than another gas one."

**Ms Wright:** I have the answer, Mr Cocks. Over 65 per cent of respondents are aware of the government's plan.

**MR COCKS:** Okay.

**Ms Malouf:** In addition, and on the power of that Make Your Next Choice Electric tool—nobody knows when their hot water system is at the end of life until Saturday

morning in July at 6 o'clock in the morning! The tool actually will tell you. You can put in the age of your appliances, and it will tell you the likely end date of the product. It is not magic. The plan puts it into order. You might think it is the heating, but it is actually the hot water system that is likely to go first. It then has a unique connection to CHOICE and provides you with alternative options, which is nation-leading in this space—to join the two dots together.

**Mr Rattenbury:** For *Hansard* purposes that is Choice with a capital “C”, as in the consumer organisation. They are the back-end partner, and I think it is a really important partnership, because there is consumer confidence in the advice that comes because CHOICE is such a trusted brand.

**MS CLAY:** We heard from some other witnesses about the gas transition death spiral, where the people who are left on the network at the end may be stuck paying a greater and greater share for the gas they are forced to use. Can you talk me through who that is going to affect and what we are going to do about it?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes. You have described it, and we touched on it a little bit earlier. The people who are left on the network, those likely to be, I characterise as two groups of people: those who are not able to make the transition and those who do not want to make the transition—“you will take my gas cooker out of my cold, dead hand” kind of attitude, and there is some of that around.

As I touched on with Mr Cocks’s question before, the consequence of that will be that if we have got \$100 million worth of gas assets that have got to be paid for, the smaller pool of people will have to pay a larger fee each. That is the risk point. It is something that the government is extremely conscious of. It is being discussed at the national level. We are discussing it with other energy ministers from other jurisdictions. We are looking overseas to think that through. We have been engaging with the Australian Energy Regulator. There are issues around them accelerating the rate of depreciation of the gas network to enable the cost to be spread more evenly over time. There is a range of steps being put in place to ameliorate that risk.

**MR COCKS:** Would it be unfair to say that the government’s steps in this space have fundamentally, at the very least, accelerated that death spiral by, essentially, banning gas?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Certainly, the government has been very clear that to meet our climate goals, to reduce our emissions at the rate that we have set out in legislation and that we want to, we have to phase out of the gas network. In a parallel universe in which we did not have climate change issues and we did not have to cut our emissions, the gas network probably would have been used for longer, but our key policy approach has been to make this decision early so that we have got the maximum amount of time to ensure an orderly and as efficient as possible transition out of the gas network.

**MR COCKS:** The death spiral, as you put it, I think was largely raised during discussions around the gas ban as an impact of the policy position.

**Mr Rattenbury:** I think there is a range of parameters. The government has taken a



decision to take the ACT out of having a gas network, so all of these things are a consequence of that decision, and we need to work hard to ameliorate the potential negative consequences of that.

**Ms Wright:** I think making the early decision, though, has also helped the gas network company to have that policy position in mind as it puts forward each of its submissions, and knowing the endgame means that it is not building infrastructure that, perhaps, is not needed. The ban on new gas connections also serves to not make that problem and that network bigger than it needs to be, so there are some good opportunities that have come out of this early announcement as well.

**MS CLAY:** And to not incur new costs that would then need to be spread to those remaining in the network.

**Mr Rattenbury:** Correct.

**Ms Wright:** Exactly.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent. Thank you very much for your time today. We will close the hearing now.

**The committee adjourned at 1.45 pm.**