



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Thursday, 5 September 2024

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

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Questions without notice

Public Trustee and Guardian—conduct

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, yesterday we heard revelations that the Public Trustee and Guardian was found by the Auditor-General to have potentially engaged in illegal activity by using over \$900,000 from the Guarantee and Reserve Account to fund its failed CRM ICT project. The Auditor-General also found that the CRM project had been a failure, is not used widely across the organisation and is currently irrelevant to most of the PTG's staff and activities. In fact, he went on to say that there is, instead, a risk that the CRM, as currently used, has created administrative inefficiencies and introduced data security risks. Chief Minister, we know the Attorney-General has taken no action to date on these very disturbing findings. Have you, as Chief Minister, sought any advice on whether the actions of the PTG were illegal in using the funds from the Guarantee and Reserve Account to fund this disastrous project?

MR BARR: Questions of legality are being investigated. More broadly, the digital area of ACT government, under the leadership of the Chief Digital Officer, is, shall I say, centralising more elements of both the design and the delivery of ICT projects. This example, I think, reflects why greater centralisation is needed.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, have you sought any advice from your Head of Service as to what action should be taken against the officials responsible for this disaster?

MR BARR: Officials are subject to both the Public Sector Management Act and the Financial Management Act. The relevant sanctions are contained within that legislation, together with any other relevant legislation.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, do you consider that the Attorney-General should bear any responsibility for this complete debacle?

MR BARR: The agency involved sits at considerable arm's length from the minister within the structure of the ACT public sector.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, you have asked the question.

MR BARR: Nevertheless, there is an oversight role, and the minister has performed that role in accordance with established Westminster practices.

Ministers—conduct

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, over the last 18 months, we have seen your Minister of State fail to take any responsibility for the waste of over \$80 million of taxpayer funds on the failed HRIMS project; your health minister failing to take any responsibility for the overpayment of millions of dollars of invoices relating to the Digital Health Record system; your skills minister fail to take any responsibility for the CIT contracts debacle, which has seen the waste of over \$8½ million of taxpayer money; and we have now seen the Attorney-General fail to take any responsibility for

what could potentially be illegal activity by the Public Trustee and Guardian. And then there is you as Treasurer. You have failed to take any responsibility for failing to even once deliver a budget surplus, for racking up over \$14 billion in debt and for lumping Canberrans with an interest bill of over \$533 million. Chief Minister, will you finally, on this last sitting day of the 10th Assembly, acknowledge that not one of your ministers has ever taken responsibility for these massive failures in their portfolios?

MR BARR: I think the fundamental premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question is factually inaccurate. Ministers have responded—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, please.

MR BARR: Ministers have responded to the specific circumstances. I do note that, in each of the circumstances, the issues do not originate from a decision of a minister or, indeed, any involvement of a ministerial office in the delivery of a project. What ministers are accountable for under accepted Westminster conventions they have been accountable for, in this place, in the media and with the public. I do not believe it is reasonable that failures of particular projects or administration within the public service—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, please.

MR BARR: Identified failures within the public service can be managed and should be managed in accordance with the Public Sector Management Act, the Financial Management Act and the Integrity Commission Act.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, do you take any responsibility for your massive failings as Treasurer over this term of government and for breaching your own Financial Management Act?

MR BARR: I have not breached the Financial Management Act.

Ms Lee: Prudent fiscal responsibility.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, please.

MR BARR: I have clearly not breached the Financial Management Act. Through a challenging period of emerging out of a bushfire disaster into a global pandemic, this—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please. You have asked the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through a challenging period, we, like other states and territories, are engaging in infrastructure delivery and fiscal consolidation whilst seeking to continue to deliver a high level of public service to our community.

What we will not do is go down a path of austerity and the sort of path that conservative governments take—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, please.

MR BARR: every time they are elected. Commissions of audit are code for cuts to the public sector, and that is what—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, resume your seat. Members, I ask that we get through question time without the interjections. You put a question; you get the answer. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The commission of audit that the Leader of the Opposition—

Ms Lee: That you did.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, please.

Mr Rattenbury: On a point of order, Madam Speaker: Ms Lee has now interjected dozens of times already and we are only on the second question of the day. After you asked for quiet, she interjected within two seconds. There has to be some restraint shown in the chamber.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Ms Lee, please, no interjections.

MR BARR: Unfortunately, the time has run out, Madam Speaker. I am sure we will come back to the topic. *(Time expired.)*

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, are you happy for the people of Canberra to hold you to account for your minister's failures, given you refuse to enforce your own Ministerial Code of Conduct?

MR BARR: Again, I reject the premise of Ms Castley's question. It is just factually incorrect. Here we are, on the final sitting day of this parliament, and the Canberra Liberals revert to their usual chorus of negativity. The "Party of No", the "Party of Austerity", the "Party of Cuts"—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! I will have to start warning people soon. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: I imagine this will be theme of question time today. It is not surprising. It is the same old Liberals—

Ms Lee: Your failures—yes.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee! One more and you will be warned.

MR BARR: Nothing has changed.

Ministers—conduct

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. This term it has been revealed that your government has wasted more than \$255 million on projects—that we know about—that have failed, have been found to be seriously corrupt, or had no oversight and governance. Some of these projects include: more than \$80 million on the failed HRIMS system; \$160 million on the Digital Health Record; and \$8.5 million worth of seriously corrupt contracts awarded to a “systems and complexity thinker”, and that is just to name a few. Chief Minister, why should Canberrans trust Labor and the Greens to manage taxpayers’ money when you have demonstrated such reckless disregard for accountability, transparency and responsibility?

MR BARR: The government continues to remain focused on the issues that matter to Canberrans: health, housing, cost of living and building the infrastructure that our growing city needs. We will pursue an agenda that seeks to enlarge Canberra to make this a better place to live and we the alternative, miserable, negative—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, members! Ms Lee, it is the last question time and I am really reluctant to warn, let alone to name, but please, I ask you, in all fairness, to stop your interjections.

MR BARR: We will adopt a positive agenda for our city’s future, not one that seeks to talk this city down, and not one that seeks to pursue a path of austerity and negativity. There is nothing new to offer from the Leader of the Opposition—a constant stream of interjection: rude, ineffective and not worthy of the role of Chief Minister.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, how can you justify the blatant waste of more than \$255 million of taxpayer money on failed, corrupt and poorly managed projects and what consequences have you or your ministers faced after this gross mismanagement was exposed?

MR BARR: I note the theme of the questions and the hyperbole from the Leader of the Opposition, not based in fact, and indeed—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee. The next time you will be warned, without question.

MR BARR: A constant stream of interjection: nothing positive to add, negative

politics, classic Canberra Liberals.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, have you received any updates from ministers about how much of this \$255 million waste they have managed to recover?

MR BARR: Recovery activities are ongoing.

ACT Integrity Commission—Community Services Directorate

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to the tabling of a confidential report by the ACT Integrity Commission which found that a former ACT public servant in the Community Services Directorate had engaged in “reprehensible conduct”. Chief Minister, have you discussed the serious findings with your Head of Service and, if so, what did those discussions involve?

MR BARR: For obvious reasons, I am not able to comment on that.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, what action has been taken against this individual in response to these serious findings by the Integrity Commission?

MR BARR: I believe that is on the public record.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, can you confirm that, just like Leanne Cover, this individual was allowed to resign, received a massive taxpayer funded payout and has suffered no disciplinary action at all?

MR BARR: No, I cannot confirm that for the Assembly, but I will take advice on that matter.

Education and training—industry action plans

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills and Training.

Minister, what steps is the government taking to attract the skills and workforce our growing city needs?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interests in skills, particularly as tonight is the ACT Training Awards.

Our government is strongly committed to building a skilled workforce, not only as our city grows but as our economy changes in terms of its needs as well. That is why I released the *Skilled to Succeed Skills and workforce agenda for the ACT* in 2022. Since the release of *Skilled to Succeed*, the government has been working with industry, training providers and businesses to consider how best to deliver on the priorities in the agenda to support key local industries in our economy.

This has shaped the Skilled to Succeed industry action plans, which are being released and contain priority actions over the long-, medium- and short-term for government, for industry and for training providers.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what are the key actions identified in these new industry action plans?

MR STEEL: There are a significant number of actions in the new industry action plans across five sectors, which include: renewables and sustainability; building and construction; caring; the experience industry; and also advanced technology industries.

Key actions across all sectors include growing the VET workforce to support experienced workers into teaching, to build capacity and capability across the sector; supporting groups that are underrepresented in the workforce to enter training in key sectors, such as women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; and enhancing incentives to train, including reviewing subsidies and supporting fee-free TAFE. Some of these initiatives have already been funded in the budget passed last night.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how does this work build on the steps that the government has taken over this parliamentary term?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her supplementary.

These industry action plans build on so much of the investment our government has made into skills and training. Last year the ACT and Australian governments signed the first National Skills Agreement in a decade, to support our vocational education and training system, to support skills development and to build our future workforce, particularly in new emerging skills areas.

We have already delivered a new electric vehicle TAFE centre of excellence through this partnership. We have been delivering strong incentives to encourage people into training through the fee-free TAFE program. Also, in the budget passed last night, we have increased subsidies to train more electricians through apprenticeships to ensure that we have the workforce that we need in the new economy.

Lakes and waterways—water quality

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction. Minister, we have talked a lot about water quality in Yerrabi Pond, so I thought it fitting to ask: looking ahead, what do you and the government see as the priorities for water quality in the Ginninderra catchment in the years to come?

MR RATTENBURY: The main water quality problems in this catchment are periodic high levels of bacteria and occasional blue-green algae blooms.

Ms Lawder: Occasional?

MR RATTENBURY: In Lake Ginninderra they are not as problematic as they are in Lake Tuggeranong; that is clear. Lake Ginninderra is the healthiest of our lakes in the catchment. The problems arise especially when heavy rainfall washes bacteria into the lake. As members are aware, there are also issues of ribbon weed and filamentous algae, which cause problems in Yerrabi Pond. The eastern half of the pond is quite shallow, and there are large beds of ribbon weed there and on the fringes of the pond to the west.

Filamentous algae grow on the ribbon weed fronds in summer. This algae is non-toxic but it is unsightly.

At times, the plants, with their attached algae, are uprooted by ducks and rafts of them are blown to the shoreline. The rafts decompose, making a rather unpleasant smell and sight. The ribbon weed is, however, important to the health of the pond, providing food and habitat, and it competes with blue-green algae for light and nutrients, helping to reduce blue-green algae blooms. They are the issues that we face across the catchment.

The solution to excessive growth of ribbon weed, filamentous algae and blue-green algae is to reduce nutrient pollution in stormwater and thus the nutrient enrichment of ponds in the Ginninderra catchment and Lake Ginninderra. The source of the bacteria is being investigated as part of current University of Canberra research and waterway monitoring in 2024-25. This work is a priority to ensure that the right mitigations are put in place. Depending on what that research shows, there are a range of mitigation options, which include preventing nutrient pollution, building wetlands and other water quality assets, direct treatment of the lake with infrastructure such as floating wetlands, and other measures that will be identified through the research process.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are plans for inviting public comment on the draft plan for Yerrabi Pond during 2025 still on track. If so, will that occur in the first half or the second half of the year?

MR RATTENBURY: Certainly, from my point of view and the directorate's point of view, they are proceeding with that work. These questions, to some extent, go to the incoming government. The Yerrabi plan is planned to go on YourSay in 2025. The timing of public consultations will be considered after the election, along with the schedule for public review of other policies, strategies and plans. What I can say is that I am really keen to see the community closely involved in these discussions.

What we know is that the community is very engaged by these questions. There are more formalised groups, like the Friends of Yerrabi Pond, but lots of people see these as important recreational areas and are keen to see them in a good state. That goes to the discussion we had yesterday and Ms Lawder's valedictory speech about Lake Tuggeranong. We know that local communities want these areas as important recreation areas. I am really keen to see a lot of community input into those discussions, both to develop a deeper understanding but also to harvest good local knowledge.

MS LAWDER: Minister, has there been any macrophyte harvesting in any of our lakes?

MR RATTENBURY: I am quite sure that there has been. I will need to take that on notice to check when and where exactly that has taken place.

ACT Integrity Commission—investigations

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, so far this term it has been revealed that Minister Berry, Minister Rattenbury and Minister Steel have all been involved in active investigations by the Integrity Commission. In addition, Minister Stephen-Smith has refused to rule out that she will form part of the DHR investigation. Chief Minister, how can Canberrans have confidence in your government when at least

half of your cabinet is embroiled in Integrity Commission investigations?

MR BARR: What a ridiculous and offensive question—a deliberate misrepresentation of the role of a witness in an Integrity Commission process. What do we call this? I think we call this the “fresh” approach by the Canberra Liberals. This is the—

Ms Lee: If you are going to do it, get it right. It’s a fresh opportunity.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee, please. You are now warned!

MR BARR: This is the fresh negativity. This is the fresh misrepresentation. This is the same old—

Ms Lee: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: Mr Barr has just said “misrepresentation”, and I ask that you rule whether that is unparliamentary.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, Ms Lee. Mr Barr.

MR BARR: This is the same old—what we try to do is package it up as fresh. It is the same tedious negativity.

Ms Lawder: A point of order, Madam Speaker, going to relevance: the Chief Minister is not answering the question. He is responding by attacking the person who asked the question. I ask that he is direct to the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. In the time you have left, Mr Barr, please go to the question.

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said in my opening remarks, misrepresenting the role of a witness is egregious and unfair, and the Leader of the Opposition should know better.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, are these ministerial positions untenable given that you have already revealed that information has had to be withheld from at least one of the ministers because they are involved in an active corruption investigation?

MR BARR: No. Here we go again: seeking to rehash and smear, through inuendo and under parliamentary privilege—coward’s corner.

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, a point of order. It is not even a quiet interjection. The Leader of the Opposition is literally yelling across the chamber. She has been warned. I will leave the decision up to you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am not going to name her. But, Ms Lee, it is the last sitting time and, if you are named, you will not be returning here until half past five. Please, I ask that you respect the standing orders of this place.

MR CAIN: Chief Minister, why have you let your government become a government of self-interest and corruption under your leadership?

MR BARR: That is offensive, untrue and not becoming of a member of parliament. Very disappointing. If repeated outside of this chamber, it would be defamatory.

Mr Cain interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain!

MR BARR: So let me be clear: I reject the assertion made by Mr Cain—the defamatory assertion made by Mr Cain in this question. If this is the sort of fresh approach that the Canberra Liberals propose to bring to this place, it is no wonder you have been in opposition all of this century and you will continue to be. This is not fresh; this is the same old tired and conservative attack under parliamentary privilege for things you know you could not say outside of this place. Typical, same old Canberra Liberals.

Sport and Recreation—grants

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, community sport is an integral part of Canberran society. Can you please outline the purpose of the sport and recreation investment scheme grants program?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. The sport and recreation investment scheme is a \$3.7 million grants program, which is designed to support ACT sport peak bodies, local clubs and less formal sport and recreation clubs, as well as community groups. The scheme provides funding to improve administration, participant and volunteer programs and infrastructure, as well as other club structures or programs. There are four categories of grants. The community sport facilities fund provides funding for sport infrastructure, planning, new sports infrastructure or sporting facility upgrades. This stream is open to ACT State Sport Organisations and not-for-profit sport, recreation or community organisations. The Club Enhancement Program is available to certain ACT State Sport Organisations and their affiliated local clubs. This grant stream is specifically intended to support governance, efficiency and sustainability projects. The State Organisation Support Program is open to smaller and developing ACT State Sport Organisations to help fund governance, planning, efficiency and other small organisational development events. The industry partnership fund is designed for the ACT government to partner in innovative, collaborative and co-investment projects with larger state sporting organisations which demonstrate high levels of capacity and capability. These projects can be administered via a three-year funding agreement.

DR PATERSON: Minister, can you give an example of support that grants provided through the State Organisation Support Program fund?

MS BERRY: Some fantastic applications were funded through the 2024 State Organisation Support Program. One example was to Orienteering ACT to improve governance, policy and planning. Through work the ACT Sport and Recreation Directorate have done with Orienteering ACT, the need was identified to write a new

strategic plan, work out a plan to increase volunteer capacity and a plan to increase participation to pre-COVID levels. This funding, provided through the State Organisation Support Program, will help Orienteering ACT to undertake this work and improve their participation outcomes, strategic plan and volunteer plan, as well as general sustainability.

MS ORR: Minister, can you provide some examples of Club Enhancement Program grants and how they are supporting clubs?

MS BERRY: I thank the member for the supplementary. Scouts ACT have been granted over \$19,000 through this year's Club Enhancement Program to invest in two camp-in-a-box packages. The Scouts have identified that there are many community groups and families who would like to be able to go camping as an activity together but do not have the right equipment to get outdoors together. This grant allows Scouts ACT to fit-out two shipping containers and fill them with good quality tents, tarps, tables, cooking appliances and other gear that they can use and can be used by community groups, such as the migrant and refugee program, and various school programs, for example, who might not otherwise be able to get the experience of camping together. These camp-in-a-box packages will be able to be used out at Camp Cottermouth. It is a great innovative project by Scouts ACT to take the recreational activities that they have, associated with scouting, and make it more accessible to more people.

ACT Integrity Commission—investigations

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. On Tuesday after question time the Minister for Health provided a statement which said: "I have consulted with the commissioner, who has noted that this issue is somewhat clouded by the terms of section 297 of the Integrity Commission Act 2018, in particular the definition of protective information. The legal advice I received last week via the directorate, I think it is fair to say, took a conservative view in relation to this definition."

Ministers Berry and Steel and you have all refused to answer questions based on your belief that you cannot divulge "protected information". Chief Minister, have you or your ministers in your cabinet, who have used this section of the Integrity Commission Act, ever actually contacted the Integrity Commissioner directly to find out what you are able to disclose?

MR BARR: I have received written advice from the Integrity Commission in relation to matters I can discuss.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, will you table that advice and confirm if your Head of Service has directed directorates to take a "conservative view" when providing advice in relation to what can be disclosed?

MR BARR: No, I cannot table that because it is provided to me in accordance with the act that I need to uphold.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, how can Canberrans trust your government when it appears that you are more focused on avoiding questions than seeking guidance directly from the Integrity Commissioner?

MR BARR: The premise of the question is incorrect. I have sought guidance. That guidance has come in writing from the Integrity Commission.

Light rail—stage 2

MS LEE: Madam Speaker, my question is to Mr Rattenbury as a member of the government's expenditure review committee.

Mr Rattenbury, last week you said that you were unable to release the costings relating to stage 2B of light rail because the government has not procured it. However, across the country there are multiple examples of governments who have released the costs—or estimates, at least—to taxpayers who will be funding these projects in the interest of accountability and transparency; for example, the New South Wales government released the \$12.5 billion indicative cost for Sydney Metro City and Southwest in 2017 before actually procuring the construction partner in 2021.

Is your government's lack of transparency purely a deliberate attempt to avoid scrutiny, as you have said publicly? If so, what does this say about your leadership of the Greens and their apparent commitment to transparency and accountability?

MR BARR: Madam Speaker, I will take this question as it relates to the expenditure review committee.

The government has released information in relation to infrastructure projects. I refer the member to the infrastructure plans that we have been updating over the course of this parliamentary term.

Ms Lee: Point of order. It is very valiant of Mr Barr to take this question on Mr Rattenbury's behalf, but the question specifically was about the Greens' apparent commitment to transparency and what do they say about that.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Lee. There is no point of order. It is referring to expenditure review committee, and the Chief can determine who responds to that..

MS LEE: Mr Rattenbury, why do you believe that the people of the ACT are less deserving of accountability and transparency than their New South Wales residents?

MR BARR: The government has released information in relation to the forward infrastructure pipeline in both the budget papers and infrastructure plans.

MR PARTON: Mr Rattenbury, why should Canberrans trust you and your Labor partners to be fiscally responsible when you refuse to tell them critical information about project costs?

MR BARR: I refer Mr Parton to my previous two answers.

Census 2026—LGBTIQ+ questions

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I was shocked and disappointed, as I am sure you were, to see the federal government fail to commit to including questions on sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics in the 2026 census. I was heartened to see your Facebook post emphasising that that is not the way we do things here in the ACT and that we take LGBTQIA+ justice seriously. Chief Minister, have you made any representations to the federal Labor government to include all three questions in the 2026 census?

MR BARR: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. Yes, I have engaged with my federal colleagues on the matter.

MISS NUTTALL: Chief Minister, do you intend to make those representations publicly available?

MR BARR: They were verbal. I did not record the conversations.

MR BRADDOCK: What wellbeing data do we collect from Canberrans regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and variation of intersex characteristics, and what is the scale and scope of this data?

MR BARR: Both through some specific projects in the health area, for example, and through periodic community surveys, we do collect a range of information. It is not as comprehensive as a census, but equally it is more timely and can occur more frequently than a five-yearly census. Through the Capital of Equality Strategy, the ACT Women's Plan, the Wellbeing Framework and a specific project in Health, we have been collecting information.

Roads—Sulwood Drive

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, the closure of Sulwood Drive for upgrade works is continuing to be a hot topic in my electorate of Brindabella. The road closure is having a significant impact on thousands of residents in Kambah and Wanniasa, and it keeps dragging on. You originally promised that this project would be completed in early August. That was then pushed back to an unspecified date in September, and now information presented to my office and being circulated widely online suggests that the road will remain closed until at least December. I seek leave to table some photographs.

Leave granted.

MR PARTON: I table:

Sulwood Drive—Copy of photos (3).

The photographs taken this morning very clearly show that this is not going to happen in September. Minister, will the reopening of Sulwood Drive be delayed once again?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Parton for the question. The main works commenced on Sulwood Drive on 6 May, and the road was planned, as Mr Parton has said, to be reopened in early August. However, the closure has now been extended through to

September 2024. I note that it is the beginning of September. This has been required due to the wet weather and the unsuitable ground conditions, and significant volumes of material have required removal. The road closure was required to enable the contractor to safely undertake the pavement and intersection works and to ensure that the required quality is able to be delivered. It is regrettable that the composition of the material has meant that further work has been required, particularly in light of the wet weather that we have had, but I know that the contractor is working as quickly as possible, and we have certainly emphasised that. I still hope that it will reopen in September, but I cannot predict the weather. We will keep the community as updated as we can.

MR PARTON: Minister, given the initial delay in reopening Sulwood Drive was announced on the day that it was supposed to re-open, how can Canberrans be expected to believe you this time?

MS CHEYNE: I agree: that was regrettable. We should give as much notice as we possibly can. It is my commitment to give as much notice as we possibly can, and we will continue to keep the community updated.

MR COCKS: Minister, how has this relatively minor project been so horrifically mismanaged?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. It is not minor. These are major works. Major underground works have needed to be undertaken. They are necessarily complicated. I suggest he looks at the photos that Mr Parton has circulated. I refer him to the first answer.

Land—Block 45, section 54 Belconnen

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning.

Minister, I can see that Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen, next to Margaret Timpson Park, is no longer listed as a demonstration housing project. Can you provide an update on what the government now intends to use the site for?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. She is quite right; the demonstration housing will not go ahead on Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen as the proponent did not meet the criteria of the RFT. This was finally determined earlier this year, and work is now underway through the planning directorate and the SLA to consider other appropriate housing uses for the site as well as looking at other blocks in the Belconnen town centre.

MS CLAY: Are residential, commercial or community uses being considered for the site?

MR STEEL: A decision has not been made about the future uses of the site, whether it be for affordable or social housing at this time. It is zoned CZ2. At this stage, no changes to the zoning have been proposed. We will consider a range of different blocks around the town centre and what may be required in terms of future housing before we make a decision. I expect that will be undertaken as part of the usual budget process.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, is public housing being considered for the site?

MR STEEL: Yes, a range of housing options will be considered for the site now that it cannot be necessarily used for a demonstration housing project as was originally proposed. We are also looking at other blocks and opportunities within the broader Belconnen town centre.

Bushfires—2019-20 bushfire inquiry

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, it has now been more than four years since the 2019-20 bushfires that devastated Namadgi National Park, and yet we have not yet seen or heard when the coroner might report on the 2019-20 bushfire inquiry. Minister, has a coroner's report been delivered from the 2019-20 bushfire inquiry?

MR RATTENBURY: I have responsibility for the Coroner's Court in that sense. No, the government has not received a copy of that report. The timing of it will of course be a matter for the coroner to finalise. As members know, under the legislation, it will be delivered to the government and the responsible minister will then take responsibility to provide any response to the Assembly if there are findings in regard to matters of public safety.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, when do you expect this report to be delivered? Are there any reasons for the delay?

MR RATTENBURY: It is not usual practice—in fact, I do not think it has ever happened—for the coroner to indicate in advance when it will come. They will send it when they have completed the preparation of it.

MR COCKS: Minister, have you made any inquiries as to the reason for the delay, given that this event took place so long ago?

MR RATTENBURY: No; I would not find it appropriate to contact the coroner to ask them for those sorts of matters.

Trees—urban canopy

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for City Services.

Minister, recently you shared with the community a number of tree related initiatives and updates. Can you provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT's tree planting targets and the latest tree canopy report?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Orr for the question.

I am pleased to say the ACT government has far exceeded the tree planting target over the past four years. There has been a huge effort in particular over the previous financial year with over 23,000 trees planted in our urban areas, and this brings the total number of trees planted since 2020 to over 65,000—well above the targeted 54,000 set in the

Urban Forest Strategy.

The latest tree canopy report shows we are in a good position to achieve the ambitious target of 30 per cent of our urban environment covered by tree canopy or equivalent by 2045.

I take the opportunity to thank our dedicated crews for the work planting, growing, caring for and scaping our urban forest. They are terrific people.

MS ORR: Minister, what changes are being made to improve the Urban Forest Act?

MS CHEYNE: In response to community industry feedback, we are making adjustments to improve the act's operation without compromising its objectives. We are amending the regulation so that Canberrans who retain 30 per cent or more canopy cover on their block, after the protected trees are removed, will be exempt from the canopy contribution agreement if it not feasible to plant replacement trees, for example, if they do not have space.

Further changes will be made to clarify that where a body corporate seeks to remove a tree on common property and the removal of the tree is not associated with development work, an owner's corporation for a unit title development is defined as a homeowner. Additional improvements will be considered as part of the legislated review.

MR PETERSSON: Minister, what changes are being made to the Municipal Infrastructure Standard for urban tree species?

MS CHEYNE: Thank you—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: You probably are interested in this actually, given your comments earlier today, Mr Parton, about the tree protection work and its impact. So perhaps you might like to listen.

Madam Speaker, the government's tree species list will be updated to reflect contemporary evidence and understanding of suitable tree species for our urban area, together with strong consideration and guidance on species' appropriateness to be planted in different environments. This is in response to the Auditor-General's report on Urban Tree Management, incorporating new species deemed suitable through the living labs trial and removing species known to no longer be suitable, together with a Fenner School report.

To begin, from the end of this year, the ACT government will be planting plane trees sparingly. While plane trees are a beautiful streetscape addition and hardy to drought and frost, there are considerable allergen concerns in addition to an aggressive root system which damages pavement and infrastructure, drops seeds which cause trip hazards and the release of irritants. This is a measured approach, Madam Speaker, but I suspect one that comes as good news for many people in this Chamber and their constituents. I look forward to the further work on this tree species list continuing next term.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, usually at the end of question time I would ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper. However, I am advised that the time for lodging questions has now passed for the questions paper that will be published tomorrow. So I will conclude question time today by saying that this, Madam Speaker, concludes question time for the 133rd sitting of the 10th Assembly.