



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE
DURING PUBLIC HEARINGS**

Asked by: Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Addressed to: Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management

Redirected to: N/A

Reference: Uncorrected Hansard Transcript [Page 64-66]

In relation to: removal of poplar trees budget

Hearing Date: 31/07/2024

QTON lodgement date: 31/07/2024

Answer Due Date: 06/08/2024

THE CHAIR: Mr Burkevics mentioned the trees along the riverbank there, and again that has been a concern raised with me. In high waters, the logs are floating downstream and creating a hazard and also sort of spreading weeds, but despite the fact that the logs were not removed, it would appear that the budget for removing and chipping the dead poplars increased from an original \$10,000 budget to \$33,000. How did that occur?

Mr Burkevics: The specific arrangements—I think it is always operational arrangements that occur that require reconsideration of budgets and the treatments that are applied. The Murrumbidgee River corridor plan of management provided strong guidance to PCS in their activities, but of course, as a good land manager, in consultation with the community, they have identified the values of retaining some of those trees, and I think those conversations are ongoing.

But I think not a day goes by do we see budget pressures emerge on different things that the land manager undertakes, and certainly I think the discussion we had earlier about climate change, severe weather events, rising river levels, falling river levels are all something that require careful consideration and management.

THE CHAIR: I guess my question was—

Mr Rutledge: Sorry, Ms Lawder. I think we will have to take the question on notice, because my figures are not matching your figures. I thought that our total expenditure for the program—for the hire of equipment on that program—was \$33,000, and to my knowledge that was the budget for that.

THE CHAIR: Yes, going back a few years, perhaps.

Mr Rutledge: Yes, a few years ago, so I will have a look at it. I know we had \$10,000 for the mulcher, we have our \$16,000 for the excavator and transport, and so that comes to \$33,000, and so I do not know where the—maybe it is because they thought it was \$10,000 and it went to \$33,000, but on those, I will check my numbers. My numbers suggest it was delivered on budget at around \$33,000, so I will double-check my numbers and get back to you, Ms Lawder.

Minister Vassarotti MLA: The answer to the Member’s question is as follows:

The management of the treescape along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor in the Tharwa area is undertaken by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS). The works are part of 30+ year program of weed control and landscape restoration. Managing these trees is a balance between maintaining the ‘park like’ characteristic of the Tharwa bridge reserve (as per the ‘2018 Tharwa village plan’) and controlling invasive species.

PCS has undertaken poisoning and felling of exotic Lombardy Poplars (*Populus nigra*), a declared weed species. No trees of heritage significance have been poisoned or felled. Several Lombardy Poplars were felled on the riverbank upstream of Tharwa in Autumn 2023 by PCS staff as part of habitat restoration works. Whilst neighbours were advised that the debris would be mulched, the contractor selected to assist in undertaking the work was not able to provide a suitable piece of equipment. Therefore, an alternative approach was taken to leave the trees on site to deteriorate naturally, whilst adding to both instream and riparian woody habitat.

The quote for the planned works totalled \$33,125.00 (GST inc.). There were three components included in this quote:

1. Use of an excavator with grab to control fell the trees (\$16,363.64)
2. Use of a different excavator with mulching head to mulch the trees once on the ground (\$10,840.91)
3. Floating the excavators to and from site (\$2,909.09).

Due to a second excavator becoming unavailable, the final works comprised only component 1 and part of component 3. The works were completed in an unexpectedly short timeframe and final total cost was only \$4,175.00 (GST inc).

Heritage listed Lombardy Poplars at Tharwa will continue to be managed for their heritage values by PCS and work is ongoing to treat other weeds of national significance including blackberry and willows along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature: 

Date: 5/8/2024

By the Minister for the Environment, Parks and Land Management, Rebecca Vassarotti