



Inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2026–2027 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026–2027

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water

In relation to: Contracts awarded to Southern Harvest Cooperative

Hearing: 31 July 2026

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 59–60

Transcript provided: 4 August 2026

Answer Due: 11 August 2026

Mr Bren Burkevics took on notice the following question(s):

MR EMERSON: Okay. So you will find out when that first preferred tenderer Southern Harvest was told as much. And since the Southern Harvest Cooperative was also awarded a \$57,970 contract on 30 June, so a month ago, to identify urban agricultural sites within the ACT. Is it considered a conflict of interest that someone who is conducting research into urban agricultural sites for the ACT government was also applying for a licence for an urban agricultural site?

Mr Burkevics: I do note that they are different procurement processes that are evaluated separately. So I think that in terms of that, it is entirely appropriate that anybody that has a desire to apply for a procurement can do so. And that will be an important body of work to identify options to expand potentially underutilised areas of government land that may be suitable for community gardens.

MR EMERSON: Was that ever identified either by yourself or by the tenderer that there may be a conflict of interest in the two contracts?

Mr Burkevics: I would need to take that on notice while I can say because, of course, some of that may be commercial-in-confidence so I would need to take that on notice.

MR EMERSON: Well, I think asking about a conflict of interest is hard to use the commercial-in-confidence, so—

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, is the question you are asking because this group would perceivably be operating an urban agricultural sites, they therefore have a conflict in identifying urban agricultural sites?

MR EMERSON: No, my question is that they are very much timed at the same time from what I can tell and the same tenderer has won the contracts to both run an urban agriculture site and conduct research across ACT into urban agricultural sites. The answer might be no that no conflict of interest was identified either by them or by the government, but I think it is a very fair question to ask.

Ms Orr: I think I am just trying to understand the conflict of interest, more specifically as to what you are going to do, but I will hand it to Mr Burkevics because I actually do not have the detail on this.

Mr Burkevics: Yes, thanks very much, minister. Of course, as part of any procurement, any conflicts of interest are treated very, very seriously. Of course, the nature of the question that you have asked does go to the core of what was submitted and what was evaluated and I would need to seek advice knowing that they are commercial in confidence.

MR EMERSON: Okay. Of course, we have a role scrutinising the appropriateness of government processes, so I think it would be in the public interest to get a fulsome answer and if not, for a very clear explanation to be provided in the response as to why this would not be in the committee's interest for it to be provided either publicly or in confidence.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson. I think sort of the—

MR EMERSON: I accept it has been taken on notice.

Ms Orr: Yes, yes.

MR EMERSON: I just want that to be read in the Hansard when you are checking what your are—

Ms Orr: We will look to get you the response without prejudicing any processes that are on the way, yes.

Suzanne Orr MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

No conflict of interest has been identified in relation to Southern NSW Harvest Cooperative Ltd being both the preferred respondent for the Block 15 Section 38 Fyshwick licence process and awarded a separate contract to identify unleased land suitable for urban agriculture.

The two matters were separate procurement processes, with different purposes, assessment requirements and decision points. The fact that an organisation has experience in the local food and urban agriculture sector does not, of itself, create a conflict of interest. In this case, that experience was relevant to the work being procured.

The broader land-identification contract does not give Southern NSW Harvest Cooperative Ltd decision-making authority over future land allocations, licence decisions or approvals. Any future use of identified sites would remain subject to ACT Government consideration, relevant approvals, and any required procurement, licence or land-use processes.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027

Signature:

By the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Suzanne Orr MLA

Date: 13/08/26