QTON No. 14

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

In tSelect Committee on Estimates 2026-2027

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

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Jo Clay MLA

Addressed to: Treasurer

Redirected to: Minister for Housing and Homelessness

In relation to: Treasury and Historic Housing Debt

Hearing: 21 July 2026
Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 34-36
Transcript provided: 24 July 2026
Answer Due: 31 July 2026

Mr Steel MLA took on notice the following question(s):

MS CLAY: Yes. In terms of commonwealth funding for infrastructure, we have got the ACT historic housing debt and, Treasurer, I know you have been very active on this one. You have a number of times asked if that debt could be waived. Over the full life of the debt, we will be paying $367 million in interest plus $290 million on the debt. And I am just wondering when you have asked the federal government whether they would waive that, what reason do they give you for not waiving it?

Mr Steel: I think Minister Berry has been sort of leading advocacy of the commonwealth on that particular matter, so I might take that on notice for her to provide an answer in relation to that. But certainly, what we would acknowledge is that for the first time in a very long time after a decade of policy vacancy, the federal government is putting money on the table for housing and does have a national housing policy and struck an accord with the states and territories, and that has resulted through programs like the Housing Australia Future Fund and the Housing Support Program local infrastructure fund that was announced in the federal budget in May. A significant flow of funds to the territory.

MS CLAY: Good job. Keep doing that. I am just interested though because Tasmania and South Australia also get HAFF funding and they got their housing debt waived. So what is the reason—it is great that we are now getting HAFF funding, as is every other state and territory. What is the reason that other states and territories got both and when we keep asking our finance minister, Senator Katy Gallagher, and when you do that and when the housing minister does that, the answer is, “No.” I am just trying to work out, do they give you a reason for that no? It just seems very random to a lotof people that two states—

Mr Steel: I have taken it on notice already the response. But certainly, I think we have done quite well out of the federal government's housing programs. The ACT is often receiving more than our fair share in some of the programs, which is really good. So I think it is not necessarily the case that we are getting the same as the other states, and territories and one of the reasons for that is that we are currently estimated to not just achieve our share of the national housing target but actually exceed it according to the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council. And so that has enabled us to unlock some of those federal grants that were not necessarily available to the other states that were not on track to meet their targets.

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

The ACT Government has raised the matter of waiving historic housing debt with the Commonwealth Government in at least 17 letters since 2019, as well as numerous meetings and forums, both with the current and previous governments.

While I do not have access to detailed responses from the Commonwealth Government for each time this has been mentioned, the more recent correspondence from Minister the Hon. Clare O'Neil MP in July 2025 advised that waiving or refinancing state and territory debt has a negative impact on the Commonwealth's debt position, which would have an impact on all Australians. As such, the Commonwealth Government maintains a high bar for the waiver or refinancing of debt. The correspondence also noted that interest rates for other loans had been lowered in 2020.

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

Signature: Date: 31/07/26

By the Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Ms Suzanne Orr MLA