



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 Elizabeth Lee MLA

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

In relation to: International wetland city status

Hearing: 31 July 2026

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 110–111

Transcript provided: 4 August 2026

Answer Due: 11 August 2026

Suzanne Orr MLA took on notice the following question(s):

MS LEE: Minister, in January '25, you received a letter from Dr Peter Bridgewater from ANU, seeking support for Canberra to apply to become an international wetland city, and Dr Bridgewater cited many benefits to that. You responded in September '25, rejecting this proposal, and in that response, you cited other government investment priorities in catchment management. What are some of those other priorities and how does that prevent the ACT from attaining an international wetland city status?

Ms Orr: I might ask Mr Lawton just to come back to the table and, Ms Lee, I hope you can appreciate this correspondence exchange was a little while ago. So I will get Mr Lawton to run you through some of the details as he works on this every day and if there is anything further, we will take it on notice and get back to you.

MS LEE: Sure. So whilst all of that, maybe just to give context, the other reason that you cited was a significant resourcing involved in this, and what modelling did you do to say—what assessment did you do?

Ms Orr: From memory, it was the directorate went away and did what signing up to this commitment would undertake and the obligations that it would require and the work that would be under that, and then it was based on an assessment of those commitments involved in progressing this matter, and where we would not necessarily have funding available and might need to redirect funding. That is my memory of what happened, but again, knowing it is quite a bit away and I do not have the correspondence in front of me. So Mr Lawton, if you have anything further to add.

Mr Lawton: Yes, so I think the government's commitments to the Healthy Waterways Program are pretty clear. I could go through them. There is a long list of stuff that we have done and—

MS LEE: Yes, no, that is okay. So—

Mr Lawton: —but we have sort of put on the table what we are going to do, but I think your question is specifically why did not we sign this document?

MS LEE: Yes, there must have been an assessment as to it was not worth it, so we are not going to go ahead with it. I am just sort of getting to the reason behind that.

Ms Orr: Maybe, Ms Lee, I do not think we have that information on hand, so maybe—

MS LEE: All right, do you want to take it on notice?

Ms Orr: How about I just take it on notice, and we will go back to you, that is fine.

MS LEE: Sure. And then you can review the letters as well, yes.

Ms Orr: Yes, yes. Yes, we can have a look at the source information.

MS LEE: Okay. Thank you.

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

In response to Professor Bridgewater's proposal for Canberra to become an International Wetland City (contained in correspondence to Minister Orr's office in July 2025), the City and Environment Directorate considered the requirements and implications of seeking accreditation.

The assessment determined that, while no new capital funding or ongoing financial contribution would be required, pursuing nomination would nonetheless have resource and staffing implications for the Directorate. This includes preparing nomination documentation, establishing a local wetland governance committee, and coordinating with DCCEW as part of a national review (required as a precursor to nomination where the country does not yet have an accredited city, as is the case here).

In the context of other competing government commitments, including delivering remaining catchment plans for the Burley Griffin and Ginninderra catchments, and because the benefits of accreditation weren't established as providing benefits significantly above those already provided through the government's investment in wetlands through the Healthy Waterways program, accreditation wasn't considered a priority at this time.

My response to Professor Bridgewater encouraged him and the Woodlands and Wetlands Trust to share, as they become available, any additional analyses about the benefits that Wetland City designation might provide.

OFFICIAL

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

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes that form a stylized representation of the name 'Suzanne'.

Date: 13/08/26

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