

2005

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

TABLING STATEMENT

Government Responses to:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Report No. 3 – Report on 2003-04 Annual and Financial Reports of the Chief Minister's Department, Department of Treasury, Department of Economic Development and related entities and ACT Legislative Assembly – August 2005;

Standing Committee on Legal Affairs: Report No 1. – Report on Annual Reports 2003- 2004: Department of Justice and Community Safety and related entities – June 2005;

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment: Report No 8. - Inquiry into Referred Annual and Financial Reports 2003-2004: Department of Urban Services, ACT Planning and Land Authority, Land Development Agency and related entities – May 2005;

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People: 2003-2004 Annual and Financial Report: Department of Education and Training and related entities, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support – May 2005.

Tabled by
Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister

I am pleased to present the Government's Responses to four Standing Committee reports on the Annual and Financial Reports for 2003-04.

Like last year, I am tabling the responses to all of the Standing Committee reports covering all portfolios. This is because the Standing Committee reports generally cover more than one Minister and more than one portfolio and, in certain cases, issues raised in the reports apply to all departments and agencies.

As members will be aware, annual and financial reports are prepared by agencies in accordance with the Chief Minister's annual report directions and in accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1996*. The government seeks to ensure that the directions and the Act are continually updated to reflect best practice and full accountability in accordance with government policy. In line with this approach, some of the issues raised in the Committee reports have already been addressed in the 2005 Annual Report Directions.

The four Standing Committee reports made a total of 19 recommendations. In broad terms the Government supports 16 of these, with 2 recommendations noted, and 1 recommendation not agreed.

The issue where the Government does not agree with the recommendations of the Committee concerned relates to reporting in Annual and Financial Reports of the quantity and quality of volunteerism in ACT Government departments and related entities.

Guidelines on volunteerism in the ACT Public Service are currently being developed, including how volunteerism should be reported across Government.

While some agencies already include qualitative information on the use of volunteers in their Annual Reports, the Government believes that the most comprehensive source of information on the volunteer workforce is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and that it is not necessary for quantitative information on volunteerism to be

included in Agency annual reports. The ACT Government contributes to the ABS Voluntary Work Survey and the General Social Survey which includes a full volunteer survey and is proposed for publication in January 2007. The General Social Survey will provide information on quantifying unpaid work, and recognising its social and economic value.

Overall, however, I am sure the Assembly will agree that the Government has responded in a manner that enhances our record of openness and accountability.

I would like to thank the Standing Committees for the effort they have made in preparing their reports.

Mr Speaker, I commend the Government's Responses to the Assembly.

2005

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment

Report No. 8

Inquiry into Referred Annual and Financial Reports
for the Department of Urban Services, ACT Planning
and Land Authority, Land Development Agency and
Related Entities – May 2005

Tabled by
Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister

15/12/05

Government Response

Report No. 8 - Standing Committee on Planning and Environment – Inquiry into Referred Annual and Financial Reports 2003-2004 for the Department of Urban Services, ACT Planning and Land Authority, Land Development Agency and related entities – May 2005

Introduction

The Annual Reports of all ACT Government agencies are referred to the Standing Committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly for examination and report.

The Standing Committee on Planning and Environment reviewed annual reports for:

- ACT Planning and Land Authority
- ACT Land Development Agency
- ACTION Authority
- Department of Urban Services
- Commissioner for the Environment
- Canberra Public Cemeteries Trust
- Nominal Defendant.

The Committee makes 4 recommendations.

Response to Committee Recommendations

Recommendation 1

3.14. The Committee recommends that Chief Executives institute processes to improve the level of discussion in reports, including clear and plain rationale of targets, trend analysis, variance in performance measures and discussion of issues faced.

Government Response

Noted. The Annual Report Directions are reviewed annually, and provide guidance to Chief Executives to ensure annual reports are clear, detailed and comprehensive. The Annual Report Directions include a requirement for Chief Executives to assess and report on overall agency performance including identifying key achievements, issues and challenges addressed during the reporting year.

Agencies are required to provide a narrative assessment on actual performance against performance measures outlined in Budget Papers, Ownership Agreements/Statements of Intent and Business Plans. Analysis should clearly describe what the agency achieved with reference to milestones and outputs, how this performance level was achieved and details of significant variances.

In addition analysis should also include where possible benchmarking or other comparisons that indicate performance levels and support management discussion, and

the reasons for performance shortfalls including any significant cost overruns, or changes to the timing of major programs or works.

Recommendation 2

4.11. The Committee recommends that the Government elevate the contribution of volunteerism by ensuring that there are strategies and guidelines developed, including for 2005/2006 annual reports, to encourage agencies to analyse, develop, nurture and report in quantitative and qualitative terms on the work undertaken by volunteers in relation to government outcomes.

Government Response

Agreed in Part. Guidelines on volunteerism in the ACTPS are currently being developed, including how volunteerism should be reported across Government.

With regard to annual reports, some agencies already include summary level qualitative information on the work undertaken by volunteers in their annual reports.

The most comprehensive source of information on the volunteer workforce is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Voluntary Work Survey and the next General Social Survey (which will include a full volunteer survey) proposed for publication in January 2007, provide information on quantifying unpaid work, and recognising its social and economic value. This is the preferred approach for responding to the recommendation on quantifying unpaid voluntary work, as ACT data contributes to national reporting providing cross sectional analysis and comparative statistics.

Specific reporting and quantitative analysis is also restricted by definitional issues, especially in relation to what is a “volunteer” and what is “work”. The distinction between volunteers and persons serving in an honorary capacity on boards and committees, and whether volunteers engaged by non-government agencies are included for reporting purposes would also require resolution. In addition significant data development work would be required including the establishment of agreed measures and an understanding of collection methodologies, before quantitative data made available by different agencies could be meaningfully interpreted.

Recommendation 3

4.15. The Committee recommends that Urban Services develop a revised approach to clarifying and sharing No Waste targets, strategies, real progress and information with the community, and provide more back-casting in future annual reports.

Government Response

Agree. The approach for reporting against the No Waste Strategy in the DUS Annual Report will be revised. Future reports will include specific waste reduction and resource recovery targets where there is useful data available, with actual progress reported against targets. Consideration will also be given to including a relevant analysis of the reason for progress or lack of progress against these reported targets where appropriate.

ACT NOWaste has already undertaken a review of how targets, strategies and public progress reporting is communicated. For the purposes of Annual Reporting ACT NOWaste will ensure that content addresses the Government's NOWaste goal, specific progress targets for the period, overview of strategies that have been implemented, clearer and more specific data/information on progress reporting and identify forward targets and strategies.

In addition to the information provided in the Annual Report, ACT NOWaste has integrated data and information on the NOWaste goal, specific targets and strategies, performance and progress reporting into a range of communication and publication initiatives. For example, the recently released "Your Guide to Becoming a No Waste Household" integrated the above approach.

Recommendation 4

4.27. The Committee recommends that, under the supervision of the ACT Planning and Land Authority, agencies' focus on sustainable transport issues should be treated as a fundamental whole of government issue. Attention and commitment should be given to high level integrated planning, research, advocacy and marketing, to demonstrate the rationale and efficacy of sustainable transport approaches. This priority and need for integration should be reflected throughout planning processes and reporting.

Government Response

Agreed. The Government agrees that the achievement of sustainable transport outcomes for the Territory is a fundamental whole of Government issue.

For this reason a high level coordination committee, having representation from the Department of Urban Services, ACTION, the Chief Minister's Department (Office of Sustainability), Treasury, as well as the ACT Planning and Land Authority, oversaw the development of the Sustainable Transport Plan.

A new Sustainable Transport Steering Committee now exists to guide the delivery of the various elements of the Sustainable Transport Plan, again drawing on representation from key agencies. In addition, a specific team has been established within the ACT Planning and Land Authority to coordinate the delivery of the Plan's elements, and members of the team have been drawn from Urban Services, Procurement Solutions, and ACTION as well as the ACT Planning and Land Authority to ensure broad government understanding and input is provided.