



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**QTON No. 16**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

JEREMY HANSON CSC MLA (CHAIR), MARISA PATERSON MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), JO CLAY MLA

**Inquiry into referred 2019–20 Annual and Financial Reports and Budget Estimates 2020-21**  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**25 FEBRUARY 2021**

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Questions taken on notice by ACT Emergency Services Agency Commissioner, Georgeina Whelan,

Asked by Jeremy Hanson MLA:

In relation to: **ACT Bushfire Council Terms of Reference and log of actions**

THE CHAIR: All right. Could you provide us a copy of the terms of reference? I am sure they are available somewhere. But just—

Mr Gentleman: Sure. Yes.

THE CHAIR: The terms of reference of—

Mr Gentleman: Yes, I looked at them about two weeks ago so, certainly.

THE CHAIR: Very good, yes.

Do you have anything to add to that?

Ms Whelan: To be honest with you, Chair, I did not see the exchange of correspondence as a spat, I saw it as an appropriate action to underpin what is a constructive relationship which I wish to continue. I have had a working relationship, now, as the commissioner, for 15 months with the Bushfire Council. I openly invited them into our incident management room during the 19-20 bushfire season, and also brief them on a regular basis.

My correspondence is on the freedom of information log, easily accessible for anybody to read. What they will see in there is my desire to ensure we continue to work constructively. So my issue has never been with the advice the council provides. I remain very confident with that advice.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Whelan: But my issue was the manner in which the information, or the conversations, were occurring.

THE CHAIR: So you are not disagreeing with issues that they have raised, just the manner in which they were raised? Is—



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Ms Whelan: In particular, and there are some issues which we will agree to disagree on, and that is the whole idea of advisory councils. And as the minister has mentioned, we will reach out to a number of subject matter experts to receive advice. Not just solely.

THE CHAIR: And those matters that you are agreeing to disagree with, can you provide them, perhaps, on notice or something like that, just—or explain to us what is it where there is that disagreement? The Bushfire Council has a view, and ESA and the government has a different view. Just curious what that is.

Ms Whelan: From my perspective, it is not my understanding that we have a disagreement on technical issues. We do have a disagreement, though, on the way in which they are assessed, in terms of risk and priority, for me as a commissioner and the tasks I am undertaking.

THE CHAIR: Right.

Ms Whelan: But happy to provide that, because we run a very comprehensive log of all actions that we undertake and advice provided to us by the Bushfire Council.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Right, thanks.

**Chris Steel MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:—**

Information on the ACT Bushfire Council (ACTBC) is publicly available on the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) website at <https://esa.act.gov.au/about-esa-emergency-services/rural-fire-service/act-bushfire-council>. This contains a link to the ACTBC Terms of Reference.

At the public hearings, Commissioner Whelan undertook to provide the Committee with a copy of a log of actions in response to the Member's question. These are contained within the minutes from the monthly ACTBC meetings which are publicly available from the same link provided above.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature:

Date:

4/3/21

By the acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Chris Steel MLA