



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

Jo Clay MLA (Chair), Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy), Mark Parton MLA

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2020-2021

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE 2

24 February 2022

Asked by Ms Clay on 24 February 2022: Ms O'Neill took on notice the following question(s):

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In relation to:

THE CHAIR: I am going to move on to the next question now, which is actually on the western edge investigation, I think the room will be delighted to hear. Look, I just wanted to get a bit more detail on where the western edge investigation is up to. Has the government tendered further ecological assessments and is all of that information about those tenders publicly available?

Mr Gentleman: I might just kick off, Chair, if I could, and thank you for that question. And as we have indicated in the conversation so far, the western edge is something that is being looked at at the moment; we want to investigate that land to see how our metropolitan area could extend. So that is about 9,800 hectares and it is generally bordered by the Murrumbidgee River, the urban areas of Belconnen, Molonglo, et cetera, and includes Mount Stromlo.

And we know the western edge contains some significant environmental values and as such, only parts, of course, of the western edge could be suitable for development. So over 2021-22 there is funding of \$477,000 and we will be assessing the capability and suitability of parts of the western edge for potential urban uses and for environmental conservation as well and in 2022-23 there is a budget of \$230,000 that will move us into the preliminary strategic planning phases.

That will give some ongoing environmental surveys in that time and that will include the identification of potential location, size of development and conservation areas, potential development types, road and infrastructure connections and bushfire threat and mitigation measures. So there is substantial work still to occur and I am sure Mr Ponton and the team will be able to give you a bit more detail on that.

THE CHAIR: That would be great. For Mr Ponton and the team, I think the information I am particularly interested in is where the tenders are up to on the ecological assessments and whether we will see those ecological assessments in the public domain and if so, when we will see those in the public domain?

Mr Ponton: Thank you, Chair and I think what I will do is I will throw straight to my colleague, Ms O'Neill, who can talk to you about the specific details of those various tenders, but I will just make the observation that yes, there are. There is some work that has concluded, there is some work that is underway and as the minister foreshadowed, we are currently scoping up and as I noted earlier, and I just want to reinforce that, that this work is sequential, because it is—you know, we learn from one to give to the next and that is why we do it in that way, but Ms O'Neill, if I could ask you to respond with further detail please?

Ms O'Neill: Thank you. Appreciate the question. Carolyn O'Neill, Executive Group Manager for Planning and Urban Policy with EPSD. In relation to the specifics of what studies have been concluded, Ms Clay, we have done several studies over the phase one of the western edge investigation works. They include, to your point, preliminary ecological reviews and assessments. We have looked at landscaped character values and visual assessments and concluded that work. We have done some preliminary bushfire risk assessment work also and some preliminary air quality assessment studies have been completed.

What we released to the market on 17 January 2022 was a further scoping document to obtain an urban capability assessment. So as the minister has spoken to, that is a far more comprehensive piece of work that goes to provide us with direction for the extent and the nature of further ecological work, as well as other technical studies that will be needed to inform the progression of that planning and the advice to government about that development capability, as well as the further work we may need to do on the conservation values and ecological issues in the western edge.

THE CHAIR: That was an excellent answer. Thank you very much. And when will we see—so we have had a tender of 17 January 2022. Will we see the results of that tender, the work that was done under that tender, in the public domain and when is that likely to be?

Ms O'Neill: Thank you, we are in the process of assessing the response, so I am fairly limited in what I can tell you with respect to the status of the responses, but we are looking to have a conclusion to that assessment within this calendar year, so as to inform and return advice to government.

THE CHAIR: That is excellent. And are you seeking advice outside of that tender process about the ecological values or is it all being focused into that tender process?

Ms O'Neill: No. Thank you, Ms Clay. There are several other studies that we will also pursue that go to a far more specific orientation around ecological values and we have outer year studies that we already know we will need to do in relation to infrastructure to do with water and other environmental matters. So that ongoing inquiry will extend beyond 2022 in order to collect all of that information—

Mr Ponton: And if I could also add—

THE CHAIR: I wonder if I could ask on notice, and on notice would be fine, for a handy list of the studies that have happened and the studies that are tendered and the studies that you know will be done and just sort of a timeframe of when that will happen? Is that possible to provide on notice?

Ms O'Neill: We certainly can, Ms Clay. Some of those areas of investigation will be by theme and as we learn more in this year of inquiry, that will assist us too with more refinement and determine those precise studies in the outer years. But taken on notice, thank you.

Mr Steel: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

Western Edge Investigations completed:

- Preliminary Air Quality Assessment Report
- Preliminary Contamination Assessment
- Preliminary Geotechnical and Hydrogeological Assessment
- Water Values and Environmental Hydrology Assessment
- Preliminary Cultural Heritage Assessment
- Landscape Character Values and Visual Assessment
- Preliminary Bushfire Risk Assessment
- Preliminary Ecological Review and Assessment
- Preliminary Assessment of Engineering Infrastructure Opportunities and Constraints

Western Edge Investigations planned for 2021/22:

- Capability and Suitability Assessment (tendered)
- Aquatic and Riparian Study (stage 1 tendered)
- *Cultural Values Assessment (scoping underway)*
- *Ecological Habitat and Flora Survey (targeted focus – scoping in progress)*

Potential Western Edge Investigations for 2022/23 subject to available budget funding and the outcomes of 21/22 studies:

- Preliminary land use studies
- Further Ecological Surveys
- Murrumbidgee River Aquatic Surveys

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services

Signature:



Date:

10/3/22

By the A/g Minister for Planning and Land Management, Chris Steel MLA