



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND CITY SERVICES

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2020-2021
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Nicole Lawder MLA: To ask the Minister for Planning and Land Management

Ref: Tidbinbilla and Namadgi National Park

In relation to:

1. It's my understanding that there are still large areas of Tidbinbilla and Namadgi that are still severely damaged from the January 2020 Orroral Bushfire. What work is being done to improve and hasten the ACT's bushfire recovery in these areas?
2. Given the significant decrease in customer satisfaction with the management of protected areas to 76% in 2020-21, how will our national parks and reserves be better prioritised moving forward by this Labor-Greens Government?
3. Why wasn't more work on recovery efforts done during the ACT lockdown when the parks and reserves were shut, given the low covid exposure risk these outdoor areas pose?
4. What consultation has the ACT Government done with outdoor education businesses whose livelihoods depend on these reserves and parks regarding bushfire recovery and Covid-19 health restrictions?

MINISTER STEEL: The answer to the Member's question is as follow, noting these questions were answered during the hearings and Ms Lawder should additionally refer to Hansard:—

1. Recovery works are progressing in line with the ACT Government's Bushfire and Flood Recovery Plan.
2. The ACT Government continues to prioritise our national parks and reserves, providing significant funding investments to support fire recovery, enhance our pest and weed control and employ additional Ngunnawal rangers.

Customer satisfaction with the management of protected areas remained high at 76 per cent in 2020-21. The decrease in the rate of customer satisfaction compared to previous years can be explained in part due to a change in methodology for the visitor satisfaction survey. The methodology used to collect data for this year was an online survey whereas in previous years the survey was done via face-to-face visitor engagement.

When assessing overall satisfaction, the fun and enjoyment experienced from being in a park is likely to lift experiential scores (the “halo effect”) compared to scores given when reflecting on an experience at home via an online survey. Normally the sentiment collected in a face-to-face survey will score significantly higher than an online survey. Nevertheless, results from an online survey are considered more statistically balanced.

Visitor satisfaction was also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and park closures.

3. A significant range of fire recovery works were undertaken during the ACT’s COVID-19 lockdown as it was allowable under the public health restrictions. On-ground works included pest and weed control and critical infrastructure repairs and maintenance. A range of planning and procurement functions were also undertaken by staff working from home.
4. The Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) maintains operational contacts between commercial users and PCS staff which allows for regular engagement regarding park access and use. PCS works closely with key users of Namadgi National Park, including Outward Bound and the National Parks Association, on the fire recovery program. Closures to public areas related to COVID-19 applied equally to commercial businesses and these were communicated broadly to the entire community at the time. As parks re-opened, full access was once again available to commercial operators able to operate in a COVID safe way.

Approved for circulation to the Planning, Transport and City Services

Signature:



Date:

10/3/22

By the Acting Minister for Planning and Land Management, Chris Steel MLA