



Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022 **ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

Asked by Ms Nicole Lawder on 1 November 2022: Dr Sophie Lewis took on notice the following question:

Reference: Hansard [uncorrected] proof transcript 1 November 2022, Page 6.

In relation to:

MS LAWDER: So in an ideal world, would you prefer there to be more obligation on the government to respond more fully to your finding that you were unsatisfied, that should there be a more formal process to obligated the government to provide a better response?

Dr Sophie Lewis: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

There is no formal process for the Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment (OCSE) to track the government's progress towards addressing recommendations contained within the Commissioner's tabled reports (Special Reports and the State of the Environment Report). OCSE understands this is the case for the suite of statutory reports tabled within the ACT by other statutory office holders and officers of the parliament, as well as within other jurisdictions. Tracking recommendations typically occurs through a combination of annual reporting and through informal mechanisms. Annual reporting mechanisms include the standing committee inquiries into annual and financial reports, which provide a means to interrogate government progress. Informal mechanisms include public accountability websites that track progress towards recommendations (for example the Bushfire Royal Commission Accountability Tracker).

Under the *Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act 1993* (the Act), the Minister responsible must, within 6 months after the day of receiving a special report, present to the Legislative Assembly a statement that sets out the response of the government to the report. Within this response, recommendations are typically 'agreed', 'agreed-in-principle', 'noted' or 'not agreed'. In agreeing to a tabled recommendation, the ACT Government commits its intention to a course of action, which should be sufficiently formal for ensuring its eventual completion.

Nonetheless, OCSE notes in the 2022 State of the Lakes and Waterways in the ACT report that numerous 'agreed' to recommendations in preceding reports from several Offices and agencies remain outstanding. In many instances, progress on report recommendations is not included in

various annual reports, and the formal status of recommendations remains unclear. In this Investigation, it is clear that existing formal processes do not inherently ensure that commitments are delivered and further scrutiny is required, including of the lead directorates responsible for delivery of recommendation actions.

To strengthen the quality of information provided to OCSE during the annual reporting process, OCSE would welcome preliminary meetings with lead directorates regarding the intention and delivery of recommendations following the tabling of government responses to tabled reports.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Signature:



Date: 10 November 2022

By the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, Dr Sophie Lewis