



Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022-2023 ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Asked by Mr Ed Cocks MLA on 17 November 2023: Mr Bren Burkevics took on notice the following question(s):

Reference: Hansard [uncorrected] proof transcript 17 November 2023, pages 34-35

In relation to: Heritage Council member and Urambi Village

MR COCKS: Okay. And just finally on this line, I understand one of the members of the Heritage Council is actually a resident of Urambi Village. Is this a conflict of interest that has been raised and how is it being handled?

Ms Vassarotti: I am not aware of this issue, but you may be, Mr Burkevics.

Mr Burkevics: So this would fall under standard council process. When this matter would come to council, that member would declare it and we would follow normal conflicts of interest procedures. The directorate has clear advice. The council will follow that advice as to how we manage conflicts of interest, but as, I suppose, the matter actually has not come to council yet for a decision, I suppose we would wait for that time.

MR COCKS: Okay, so sorry, it essentially sounds like what you have just said is you will manage the conflict of interest by managing the conflict of interest. Can you provide any more detail around how it will be managed other than being declared? Or has it not been—will it not be looked at until a meeting?

Mr Burkevics: I think the directorate and the ACT government has very strict conflict of interest arrangements and at the time when that matter comes up for council deliberations and discussions; like any matter that comes before council, there is a standing declaration of interests. I think it is a very routine matter to manage conflicts of interest. Of course, without the detail of what the conflict of interest would be—and it is not appropriate to talk here in any detail—but I can assure you, Mr Cocks, there are very rigorous conflict of interest arrangements that apply to heritage decision making.

Ms Vassarotti: I would also note that through induction process that, you know, we have actually undertaken significant induction processes with this council. Issues such as conflict, yes, are covered in

these issues. It is the reality of us living as people in a community; potential and actual conflicts of interest, you know, may arise and then it is around the way to manage those which is a fair—as, you know, there are very standard procedures around this.

MR COCKS: So has it—

Ms Vassarotti: We will provide you with that conflict of interest—the government’s conflict of interest policy.

MR COCKS: Yes, that would be useful, but has this particular conflict of interest been raised through those induction processes or appointment process?

Mr Burkevics: We might need to take that on notice. I do not think we have got the specifics before us, Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: Yes, thank you.

Ms Vassarotti: Yes, I would note that we probably would not expect a member of council to, you know, anticipate a range of things. There could be circumstances where people may not—you know, like, may not know it is—

MR COCKS: You would not expect someone you are appointing to the Heritage Council to be aware that they are living in a property with this situation? This is the situation with their house they are living in?

Ms Vassarotti: But it is not even an issue that has come to council, so—

MR COCKS: But you would not expect the person living in that property to be aware?

Ms Vassarotti: We will take the question on notice, Mr Cocks, about whether or not—we will take it around the conflict of interest policy as well as, you know, what the standard process for providing advice around conflict of interest.

Mr Burkevics: Maybe so. Thanks, minister. I think it just reaffirmed that every employee, statutory office holder, has specific responsibilities around their—and an appointee to a council has specific responsibilities around their conflict of interest matters. As I mentioned, there are very strong frameworks and policies and procedures that apply and it is up to each individual to apply those. Thank you.

Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA: The answer to the Member’s question is as follows:—

The current Heritage Council members were appointed to their roles in April this year, following the review and an associated suspension of decisions relating to the Heritage Register for around one year. Urambi Village is not on the Assessment Priority List for 2023/24 and therefore has not been considered by this Council in any capacity.

When Urambi Village is to be considered by the Council, Council members will follow Conflict of Interest guidance regarding their involvement. Should a Council member be a resident of Urambi Village, this member would exclude themselves from discussion and decisions regarding Urambi Village. All Council members are keenly aware of their obligations under the *Heritage Act 2004* and

their responsibility to declare all conflicts of interest and act with utmost probity in all Council business.

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

Signature: 

Date: 24/11/2023

By the Minister for Heritage, Ms Rebecca Vassarotti MLA