



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

**Reference: Sustainability charter**

THURSDAY, 1 JUNE 2006

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



## **INTERNET**

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to:  
**<http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au>**

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE**

**Thursday, 1 June 2006**

**Members:** Dr Washer (*Chair*), Ms George (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Broadbent, Mr Entsch, Ms Hoare, Mr Jenkins, Mr Kerr, Mr McArthur, Mr Ticehurst and Mr Wood

**Members in attendance:** Mr Broadbent, Mr Entsch, Ms George, Ms Hoare, Mr Jenkins, Mr Ticehurst and Dr Washer

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

Key elements of a sustainability charter and identify the most important and achievable targets, particularly in relation to:

1. The built environment;
2. Water;
3. Energy;
4. Transport; and,
5. Ecological footprint.

**WITNESSES**

**STARR, Dr Paul, Senior Policy Officer, Policy Coordination Division, Department of the Environment and Heritage..... 1**

**TUCKER, Mr Mark, First Assistant Secretary, Policy Coordination Division, Department of the Environment and Heritage..... 1**



---

**Committee met at 10.34 am**

**STARR, Dr Paul, Senior Policy Officer, Policy Coordination Division, Department of the Environment and Heritage**

**TUCKER, Mr Mark, First Assistant Secretary, Policy Coordination Division, Department of the Environment and Heritage**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment and Heritage inquiry into a sustainability charter. This is the second public hearing for this inquiry. Today the committee will hear from the Department of the Environment and Heritage. At this stage of the inquiry, we are concentrating on the Auditor-General's report on green office procurement. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise the witnesses that these hearings are formal proceedings of the parliament. Consequently, they warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. It is customary to remind witnesses that giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Would you like to make some opening remarks?

**Mr Tucker**—With your agreement, and if the committee is interested, I thought it might be helpful to the committee if we gave a very brief update of where we are at with some of the recommendations in the report that relate directly to the department.

**CHAIR**—That will be great.

**Mr Tucker**—Firstly, let me say that we welcome the opportunity to brief the committee with regard to the Audit Office audit of green office procurement. As I said, I would like to brief the committee on the progress the department has made in relation to the particular recommendations addressed to us. As you are probably aware, the Australian government Department of the Environment and Heritage is the lead agency responsible for much of the policy concerning green office procurement. We commended the ANAO for their work in the audit, and they reported our commendation in the audit. We consider that the audit report will assist us in our work of encouraging agencies to improve their environmental performance and, in some ways, their business performance. The documented case studies, where cost savings and performance benefits from initiatives have been pursued by agencies, will also be of value to all Australian government agencies in this matter.

On the department's overall response, we noted in our response to the draft ANAO report that, while we generally support their recommendations, we need to be strategic about our involvement in this work. We do not have a lot of resources in the department to pursue this, so we have to pick the things that will work best. We also believe that the benefits of environmental purchasing and a commitment to improving environmental performance generally should be demonstrated by Australian government agencies. But an important point we have made in the report is that it should be noted that the primary responsibility for performance rests with the government agencies themselves. While we can provide guidance and assistance, we cannot do this work for them.

Regarding some of the particular recommendations that pertain to us, on recommendations 2 and 6, the department is developing a new website to allow content from agencies to be presented as a one-stop shop for the public sector. They are specific recommendations that pertain to us and we are progressing them. The sustainability in government website is expected to be launched in October this year. We have registered a new domain name for it: [www.sustainability.gov.au](http://www.sustainability.gov.au). It will specifically address those recommendations. An online discussion list will be attached to this website, allowing more effective peer-to-peer communications between APS staff on sustainability issues, including environmental purchasing. We have also prepared a draft environmental purchasing checklist for information and community technology services contracts, which we have circulated to Australian government agencies for comment prior to finalisation. We expect to release a revised version of the checklist for public consultation in the latter half of this year.

On some of the other recommendations that pertain to us, recommendation 7 relates to the vehicle fleet. In order to reduce the emissions from the Australian government vehicle fleet, the ANAO recommended the encouragement of greater energy efficiency in the Australian government fleet. The department will be examining data collected for the report *Energy use in the Australian government's operations 2004-05* and other relevant information. Subject to the outcomes of that examination, it will provide advice and changes to policy measures and targets.

In relation to recommendation 9, which involves sustainable water management practices, the department has developed new guidance on water efficiency building and on the water efficiency labelling scheme that the government has introduced. National water intensity benchmarks for office buildings and public buildings have been developed which identify average better practice and best practice water use in these facility types. They were developed in collaboration with the governments of Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and the ACT. Furthermore, a new water efficiency guide focusing on opportunities to reduce consumption and increase reuse in office buildings and public buildings is scheduled for completion in June this year. Work has also commenced on developing water intensity benchmarks for hospitals and benchmarking of school water use and is expected to be completed in 2006-07.

Recommendation 12 concerns energy reporting. The department, in compiling the report *Energy use in the Australian government's operations*, will be implementing the ANAO recommendation that the focus of reporting be on changes in energy intensity. We will include explanations and any reported changes in total energy consumption in our report.

On the subject of the proposed new policy framework, the most substantive recommendation from this department's point of view was to strengthen the sustainability framework for Australian government operations by pursuing a number of strategies. We are proposing to develop a new policy framework for agency environmental performance in 2006, which will assist in setting priorities for future agency action. The policy will build on present encouragement for agencies to develop an environmental management system. The ANAO pointed out the benefits for the agencies that had an EMS in place in terms of their awareness and action on green office procurement. On our specific progress, our work involves developing a new, short, principles based framework to guide the efforts of other agencies in improving their environmental performance. A draft of this framework will be released for consultation in the latter half of this year.



I have one concluding comment. The department's operational response is that the department has been actively pursuing resource use efficiency as part of the implementation of our environmental management system. Much of this information is available on the department's second triple bottom line report. I have brought a summary for the committee, which I am happy to table. I have also brought another recent publication that the department has produced: the *ESD design guide for Australian government buildings*. All these give effect to the recommendations of the Audit Office.

**Mr BROADBENT**—I think that is an excellent summary. Would you like to elaborate just a little on the two publications you mentioned in your opening remarks?

**Mr Tucker**—I will hand around the triple bottom line report. There are certainly enough copies for members who are not able to be here. This is our second triple bottom line report. We are only one of two Australian government agencies that produce them; the other is the Department of Family and Community Services. If you have time to look through the report, you will see the enormous number of environmental benefits from the way we have done things in the department. The important thing, and what I would like to stress to the committee, is how much that has improved the financial management of the organisation. Paul can correct me on the details, but the decrease in our energy usage is extraordinary. The government has a benchmark for energy use in government buildings. We are about 53 per cent below.

**Dr Starr**—I think it is 52 per cent.

**Mr Tucker**—We are 52 per cent below that. If you use less energy, it costs you less. So we have made enormous financial savings in the department as a result of working through these things. We now have reports across all our major streams, if you like, of impact on the environment: our waste, our energy, our water usage, our contribution to the biodiversity of Australia and our social performance—this was released by the minister himself; he has a great personal interest in these matters and has written a foreword. It is based not only on our Canberra operations, because as a department we have operations right around the country. It also picks up our Antarctic operations and our park operations in the Northern Territory and Booderee in Jervis Bay. We are looking to expand this to cover all our operations in the years ahead.

I should also say that this is an emerging form of reporting. It is a voluntary arrangement within government agencies, although they are encouraged to do it. I think it is fair to say that people still take a different approach. It is something that will evolve over time. Hopefully, in the years ahead we will find a common ground in what is the best way to do these things.

**Mr BROADBENT**—It is one thing for us to have a sustainability charter; it is another thing for you to produce these two pieces of very good work. Ultimately, as you said in your opening statement, it is up to not only other departments to implement but also your own department. Tell me about the response of the people on the ground. Is there enthusiasm to pick all this up and drive it?

**Mr Tucker**—Naturally, because we are the environment department, the people in the department have a specific interest in this. They are the sorts of things that drive people. While we have people who are interested from an environmental perspective, the management of the

department also saw it as a way to get a better handle on some of our costs. It is the adage that you will hear in business: if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it. That same principle applies to us as we are a big organisation. If we know how much waste we are producing and how much energy we are using and we know the costs, we can ask, 'Can we do something about it?' So that was one of the drivers for the organisation.

The people on the ground have a lot of enthusiasm. We have an internal group called Econet officers. These are people specifically trained to help us reduce the environmental impact of our operations. Perhaps a trivial matter but one worth informing the committee of is that we have no waste bins in the department. In our kitchens, we have bins which are separation points. If you generate waste at your desk eating your lunch or having a drink, you do not pop it in a bin with all the waste. You take it to the kitchen and put it into green waste, recyclables and general waste. The green waste is taken out to worm farms and the recycled waste is picked up by a private contractor and goes into the recycling system. We also have specific containers for paper, including material that is cabinet-in-confidence or has a certain security classification. Obviously that has to be locked up and disposed of in a certain way. Stuff that does not have a security classification just goes into the recycling system. So we have implemented a number of measures on quite a small level within the department.

**Mr BROADBENT**—I would like to talk about the mirror effect. When the Audit Office gave evidence, they went through their own processes. Those processes caused them to have to look in the mirror at what their department was doing. They reported to this committee the savings they have made, which have been astounding, particularly in their new buildings. It is much more difficult with their older buildings and processes, where they do not have those facilities. Do you think there is a mirror effect on your department, after producing documents you have presented today, that is driving the change? Second, do the managers at all levels of different departments get a chance to look into that mirror?

**Mr Tucker**—It has certainly helped us. We produced our first triple bottom line report last year. But it is always good to have something that makes you re-examine what you are doing and to look at ways you can improve your performance. One thing we have done in this triple bottom line report is set targets for the near future. We are saying we want to make improvements to where we are now. That is also a useful way for us to continue to look at our performance and to improve. It is probably fair to say—Paul will again correct me if I am wrong—our feeling is that we are a bit more advanced than other departments in many of these matters, probably because it is our business. But we get a little disquieted that other departments just see it as the next green fad rather than being important to their business. It actually can improve their business performance and improve their operational bottom line.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Having looked at our sustainability charter, there are two things I would raise with you. One is the importance to the business bottom line of government—the costs are important—and how we can enthuse people and show them that there is a benefit to them and a broad benefit. Secondly, how do you see what you are doing at the moment, particularly with these two documents, fitting into a sustainability charter? I apologise for the broadness of the last question.

**Mr Tucker**—On the first question, there are arguments about making these things mandatory or not. In a sense, I am not sure that is the right argument. As you say, it is about how you make

people enthusiastic about it and actually want to do it. Even if you compel them to do it, if they are not interested, public servants are very good at finding ways to say they are doing things and, as you would know, things actually do not happen very much. We think it really has to be an—

**Mr BROADBENT**—You know I cannot admit to that!

**Mr Tucker**—Well, I just did! I think we need to continue to educate and provide examples of how it is beneficial. Part of the reason for this new website we are setting up is to bring in case studies—not only our own but from other agencies, where some people are doing fantastic things. We need to get out and tell people more about what it can do for business savings. I think there needs to be a lot of ongoing education and a demonstration of the benefits. That is where we see the sort of value we can add, because we have done a lot of it ourselves.

We also have good contacts in the business world, which is also doing things such as triple bottom line reporting. A lot of the big companies around Australia are doing it. We talk to them regularly. They are interested in what we do as well. We have very good relationships with those big companies in terms of what they would regard, I suppose, as some of their social responsibilities. They also see it exactly the same way we do: if you can measure it, you can manage it better. Things like energy, water and waste are costs to business. If they can find ways to reduce those costs, they are absolutely delighted.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Before you answer the next question, I want to mention greenhouse gas emissions. We can do a lot with cleaner coal production and the baseline production of energy. Has there been any measurement so far through your department of a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions because of the outcome?

**CHAIR**—A reduction in consumption.

**Mr Tucker**—I refer the committee to page 6 of this document, headed ‘Greenhouse’. You will see little pie charts on the left which describe the various parts of the department and their greenhouse gas emissions. The second one says ‘Performance’. It looks at net greenhouse gas emissions from the John Gorton Building and the Edmund Barton Building. A little further down the third sentence states:

The use of green power electricity prevented 1406 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and made up 97% of the total electricity purchased.

We almost offset our entire greenhouse gas emissions through renewable sources. We also offset 142 tonnes of vehicle emissions through the Greenfleet program. So we take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, once we do produce them, we also take action to offset them. That is part of our social responsibility in the environment department. So we do take those matters quite seriously and we can measure them.

Your second question was about a sustainability charter. A sustainability charter can be a very broad thing. One thing that we are very interested in is to try to do things which actually make a practical difference. In our view, the use of case studies, guidance, better information for people and going out there and talking to people to make things happen will get a bit more traction in the first instance. It will be up to the government to decide if it wants to do a broader policy

framework around these things. At the moment, with our limited resources, I think it would be fair to say that we are keen to get out there and do the practical things.

**Ms HOARE**—I return to your opening statement, where you referred to other government departments and agencies. You spoke about how you provide guidance, support and assistance. Can you elaborate on how you do that? Will all these good practices that your department has implemented go on the new sustainability website?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes.

**Ms HOARE**—Will other departments put their good practices on it?

**Mr Tucker**—That is exactly what we are proposing. I will go back a step. Some of the reasons—and it would have come up in the Audit Office report—that people do not take these measures is that they do not quite know what the first step is. We are going to provide simple guidance. We will say, ‘To do this, the first things you should do are A, B and C and so on’, and then give examples of how people have actually done it and what the benefit has been. It gives people a guide on how to start plus examples of the end result. The other thing we want to put on the website is the capacity for a discussion group. Someone can say, ‘Look, I’m trying to do this piece of work and I’m having these difficulties; has anybody else come across this before?’ We hope it will happen in a way that people can share knowledge, experience and get guidance from each other rather than just a written document. It will give the capacity for people to interact. I think that is also important. Again, because it is our business, we understand it. But if you have somebody who has just come in—I do not want to nominate particular departments—who is a pure procurement officer and does not know any of this sort of stuff, there is benefit in us giving them assistance and the confidence to do it. But at the end of the day, they are the ones who actually have to do it.

**Ms HOARE**—Would there be a danger in the website then becoming overloaded and just too difficult for somebody to navigate?

**Mr Tucker**—One of the comments made by the Audit Office is that our current website is difficult to find. We have taken that on board and are redesigning it to make it simpler. We will also road test it with people who use it. We will say, ‘Is this easier for you to use now? What suggestions would you make to improve it?’

**Ms HOARE**—Finally, through this inquiry we have had some initial discussions on a sustainability charter and whether there should be set targets or achievable goals. In your paper, you show the performance and with some of your key goals you have set targets. At what stage in the process would you end up with targets rather than goals? A new department may come in. As you say, the procurement officer would have some goals but would not necessarily be able to set targets yet. But somewhere down the line, once they started reporting and reviewing, they would be able to do that.

**Mr Tucker**—Yes. We see the target and goal setting as very important because you have to have something to aim for. While being difficult, it is much easier to do when you are actually talking about a building. I know the policy debate that is going on about a sustainability charter. The only comment I would make is that I think it is much harder to do when you do not have

control or where you are only a player in the broader sustainability debate. In the environment overall, the major manager of Australia's environment is the states. We intercede on various things within the government's policy. So it is certainly much easier to do for something that is fully in your control, as our fleet, our building and our own operations are. The broader that canvas becomes the more difficult it becomes, I would suggest.

**Mr TICEHURST**—On the energy side, what sort of things have you done to reduce the usage of power?

**Mr Tucker**—One of the simple things is to put in lighting that uses much less power—for example, light bulbs that have a longer life and use much less power. Paul, would you like to comment?

**Dr Starr**—There are a whole range of things that we have done, though not all at once. It has been a fairly staggered process. As Mark said, we have changed some of the fittings, be it a bulb or a fixture. We have instituted some computerised control linked to building management systems so that, for example, we switch lighting off in zones when occupancy levels fall. We purchase green power. It is not a technical solution, but it is one of the really effective ways of reducing our net emissions. I attended an event that Centrelink ran yesterday. They announced their first public environment report and a new partnership with ActewAGL that will include a 25 per cent average accredited green power purchase across 78 Centrelink sites nationally. That kind of initiative is being taken up beyond us as a department. Some of it is behavioural as well.

**Mr Tucker**—I would also add that we occupy an old building, the old administration building, which is now the John Gorton Building. That building was refurbished. The refurbishment had a very strong environmental bent, though obviously we still wanted to keep it within the proper specifications of value for money. I had been into that building many times before and I did not know there were huge light wells in the middle of it. When it was occupied by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, for security reasons they were all essentially walled up. We took all that out. These light wells would be half the size of this room. There were about half a dozen in various parts. So enormous amounts of natural light came in, which reduced our need for artificial lighting. Another simple thing we do is in meeting rooms, which have motion detectors. So if there is nobody in there and the lights are on, the detectors will turn them off. It can be a little bit funny at times, because you will be sitting there and the lights will go off, so someone has to wave their arms to get them to come back on.

**Mr TICEHURST**—What about water efficiency?

**Mr Tucker**—We have done a number of things, one of which has been reported rather contentiously in the newspapers. We collect water that falls on the building itself and use some of that in watering the garden. I think we also have some water use efficiencies for our toilets—low-flush toilets and so on. We have looked at the ways we have landscaped the area around the building. There are mainly native plants or low water use plants. Again, we do not have a high upkeep in water usage for those areas. We have only a limited capacity to do that because it is in the Parliamentary Triangle and the landscape features need to be maintained. Paul might want to add a bit more detail.

**Dr Starr**—We put in a couple of other things at the time of the major refurbishment of the building. One of the first grey water systems in a commercial office building in the country was put into the John Gorton Building, which takes water and recycles it through subsurface irrigation onto some of the lawn areas and native plants around the building. We put in a flow management device system to reduce the supply of water to a lot of outlets through the building such as sinks and hand basins. We have also had a program of audits, where we check water use, complemented by things like leak reporting. We are putting effective signage in place at the places where things can go wrong, knowing that, if people see it and it is easy to report it to facilities management or after hours through the security service, we can make sure that leaks do not go undetected and unrectified. It is a mix of the technical and the behavioural.

**Mr TICEHURST**—What about Greenfleet? What are you doing in that area?

**Mr Tucker**—Greenfleet is a program. Who offers Greenfleet?

**Dr Starr**—Greenfleet offers Greenfleet.

**Mr Tucker**—Greenfleet they plant trees to soak up the carbon dioxide generated through the use of fuel and vehicle emissions. If you are a member, it is a simple arrangement: you pay a premium—I am not sure how much it is; it is not a large amount—to help with the offset of those emissions.

**Mr BROADBENT**—How long ago was the refurbishment of the John Gorton Building?

**Mr Tucker**—When did we move in? Was it 1997 or 1998?

**Dr Starr**—A lot of work was done in 1996 or 1997, I think. It was before I was with the department.

**Mr BROADBENT**—So it is nearly 10 years on now?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes. That would be about right.

**Mr BROADBENT**—During the drought that we have just experienced, how did your lawn look?

**Mr Tucker**—The lawn looked okay. We do not have control over watering the lawns, unfortunately. It is part of the Parliamentary Triangle.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Didn't you say you have grey water going out into those areas?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Were they different to other people's lawns? How did the building look?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes. They were different from other people's lawns.

**Mr BROADBENT**—So were they maintained at normal levels or not?

**Mr Tucker**—You have reminded me of something else, which I will come back to in a moment. Water use was decreased in line with the restrictions applying in the ACT. But certainly some water continued to be applied, which made it look better than the lawns around town. But you have just prompted me about another point. One of our other responsibilities is for the Australian National Botanic Gardens at Black Mountain. I suspect the data is probably in this document; Paul will know the detail. It maintains some of the greatest collections of Australian flora in the country. They were able to maintain those plants and the condition of the Botanic Gardens—this is from memory; Paul might have a better idea—with about a 40 per cent decrease in water usage. They won an award for doing that. We not only manage our own building; we also have staff who have practical experience in managing water resources out in the country.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Did the grey water and the reused water—

**Mr Tucker**—Go onto the lawns?

**Mr BROADBENT**—go to the lawns?

**Mr Tucker**—No. It went mainly to the plants.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Didn't you say it goes out automatically?

**Dr Starr**—There is a zone. It is not the entire area of the lawns around the John Gorton Building.

**Mr BROADBENT**—So you still have outflow of grey water and stormwater?

**Dr Starr**—Yes.

**Mr Tucker**—Another thing I should say is we actually are not the building owners. We just lease. The building is owned by the Department of Finance and Administration. So we have some limitations in what we can do.

**Ms HOARE**—Have the Botanic Gardens continued that 40 per cent reduction?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes, they have. They have continued it. That is not our only area of active management. I mentioned the parks before. We have Kakadu National Park, Uluru and Booderee. The other area that is reported in here is our Antarctic operations. There is very large fuel usage in our Antarctic operations, which is very difficult to offset. But they have some measures in place. They have a wind generator at Mawson. They have looked at some improvements. It is a very difficult, alien climate. That is the only way we can currently operate, with that fuel usage.

**Mr BROADBENT**—During the process of the refurbishment of the building and the changes that you made that had the positive environmental outcomes, were Finance and Administration a part of that? Did they have an officer liaising with you about that?

**Mr Tucker**—Yes, they did.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Were they affected by the mirror effect with other buildings, or is their mirror broken?

**Mr Tucker**—I would like to think so. Certainly in the construction—it was not my responsibility at the time—when the building was refurbished, the Department of Finance and Administration agreed to a number of principles to improve the environmental performance of the building and the refit. For example, when material was pulled out that was structural in nature, there was consideration of whether it could be reused on the site. The water reuse system we have is for the building as a whole, so it is not just on our side. We occupy about two-thirds of the building and Finance occupies about one-third. The lighting is continuous throughout. But I am not sure whether they have all the processes we have, such as waste separation and no bins. I do not know if they have that. Paul may know.

**Dr Starr**—They have much less of that than we do.

**Mr Tucker**—So I think we have had a little bit of impact, but they have not gone as far as we have.

**CHAIR**—Harry, do you have a question?

**Mr JENKINS**—I have a few things, but I am hoping that Comrade Broadbent asked my questions, because I have not been here. I am sorry that the Supervising Scientist and worms were not mentioned.

**Mr Tucker**—I mentioned them with the department.

**Mr JENKINS**—I must say that this *Triple bottom line summary report* is a very impressive document, because it goes to a lot of what I think we are going to explore. I am interested in what metrics you can use with a building. We have the classification of the building. Should we look at a building's ecological footprint? That then goes to matters of energy and water use and things like that. Is that an appropriate way of looking at things and paring them down? You can look at the ecological imprint of a town, a city and things like that, but can you then pare it down to say, 'Each of these elements put together can lead to that result?' Is that the way we should tackle it?

**Mr Tucker**—You certainly can do that. The methodology is not perfect yet, so depending on who does it you will get slightly different answers. There are a number of different assessment techniques. There is the ecological footprint one that you just mentioned. That is quite a useful technique. Another one is lifecycle analysis. People tend to look at a product only for the time they are using it rather than say: 'How much energy went in to make that product? What happens when you finish using it? Where does it go? What is its environmental impact?' We are interested in looking at the full life cycle of products and services, including buildings. Again, it is a methodology that is still developing. It is not precise. A number of assumptions have to be made on the way.



The thing that I probably would say in relation to your question is that methodologies are developing to help us better measure these things. We support the development of those methodologies. They are probably a way off getting them perfect, but we can measure specifics, such as these things. We can then feed into them. We ask, 'Can we take action to either reduce the impact or offset it?' We tend to use a bit of the ordinary waste management framework, which is first of all trying not to produce any waste. If you do, you then try to reuse it or recycle it and so on through the hierarchy. So there certainly are methods. But the ones we are finding most beneficial for us in terms of managing the operation of the building—as I said, we are not the building owners; we use the power and water—is to actually deal with those things we can measure.

**Mr JENKINS**—When I first came in, you were talking about your concern that you really have not had a flow-on effect to other departments. I do not want to say that that is what you were saying because I was only briefly here. But a lot of this would be a good example.

**Mr Tucker**—Yes.

**Mr JENKINS**—I am aware that the challenge is triple line or quadruple line. I sense that one way to bring along some of the important persuaders, if not decision makers, within the Public Service is to go back to the single line talking about dollar values. I do not want to get stuck on the Supervising Scientist, but I thought that the organic waste and the worm farm are interesting in that they end up being a food source for another program for the purple spotted gudgeon or whatever it is. Hopefully it does not glow purple. That is by the bye. As a subset, there is something that you could actually place a value on in dollar terms. I do not want to get stuck into that, but sometimes it is great to have those examples, where you say to the people who are the persuaders but who need to be convinced: even if you take just that line item, come on board.

**Mr Tucker**—I did say earlier that I do not hide from that at all. It is something that I think we should be really up front about. If you can actually reduce your energy costs, for example, it saves you money. It is not only good for the environment but, if you are a business, it is good for the pockets of the shareholders in business. If you are a department, it frees up moneys that can be put to other things which are important for Australians. So I think it is actually one of the things we should be putting a lot of emphasis on, because it is real.

**Dr Starr**—That was a constant theme of the presentation by Jeff Whalan, the Centrelink CEO, yesterday at the environmental launch: that this is about real, measurable outcomes achieved over several years. It was not a quick process. A lot of people were involved and it took quite a while. But they have reduced their paper use and their energy consumption and improved their performance across a selection of different environmental issues. They can count up the benefit, and their staff appreciate knowing that.

**Mr Tucker**—I do not think I said we are having little impact on other departments. It is more difficult to convince some departments than others.

**Ms GEORGE**—I am sorry I came late. I missed all the introduction. I was dealing with appropriations. In trying to grapple with where we head on this charter, I take your point that the wider the scope, the less impact and the more difficulties in terms of measurable outcomes. Is it

more appropriate for the committee to consider a set of objectives that people could then apply so they devise their own kind of management systems to give effect to those objectives?

**Mr Tucker**—Perhaps. I suppose I have not sort of given much thought to it, really. I really have not thought that through, I am sorry.

**Ms GEORGE**—If you have some thoughts about that as the inquiry progresses, could you advise us accordingly.

**Mr Tucker**—Certainly.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned that the states have the main responsibility. In that *Sustainable cities* report, that I am sure you are aware of, our model for rewarding the states is based on the National Competition Council model. If they meet a certain set of requirements agreed to under COAG, we reward them accordingly. Whether that is accepted by government, we will wait and find out. The question people always ask is: what are you going to do with business? At the end of the day, how do we reward business for this? I just throw that in. My gut feeling is that if you get a good environmental building, the health of the people working within that building—I do not know whether this has been measured—is better. You have fewer sick days and more work days. It even applies to occupational health and safety. There is such a thing as sick building syndrome. This one is a classic example because air circulation is very poor. We do not get a lot of new air. It is like a big dome. There are a lot of volatile substances such as paints et cetera. Can you comment on whether there has been any measurement of that, because it would be a way of saying to business, ‘Hang on, you have a responsibility?’ I am just putting a proposition forward.

**Mr Tucker**—From my knowledge, I think there is data on that. We could provide to the secretariat some further information for the committee and some detail on that.

**Dr Starr**—The major study that is most often quoted is a Californian buildings task force study. It stated that, if you can realise those productivity benefits—fewer sick days, reduced rates of absenteeism and more productive people in the office because they are not operating at half-capacity when they are there—and if you are the kind of office based organisation where salaries are far and away your most significant cost, that is one of the best benefits from having a green building and running it well. That is the other issue that we try to raise in the advice we provide to agencies. It is never just a matter of the building; it is also significantly a matter of how the asset is operated, be it by the tenant, facility manager or owner. Getting the actual operation of the asset right is also a crucial part of things like productivity.

**Mr Tucker**—We are happy to provide some further information to the committee. Pages 14 and 15 of this document have information about social sustainability and occupant satisfaction of buildings. A table on page 15 talks about productivity increases. There are some particular areas around the world. There is the acronym IAQ, which is indoor air quality. So an improvement in indoor air quality has actually led to those workplaces having productivity increases.

**CHAIR**—Is the Audit Office able to audit this building?

**Mr Tucker**—I do not see any reason why they would not be able to.

**CHAIR**—I do not know whether they have done it, but I think we should ask them to come and do it. I have seen more upper respiratory illness and problems in this building than I have seen anywhere else. I do not know whether that is just a coincidence or we are all sick chappies or something. We should ask them to come and look at this building.

**Mr BROADBENT**—I will have my two bob's worth: I have trouble with my eyes the whole time I am here. I am probably talking about an attitude. The attitude I have taken now is: instead of walking back within the building to my office, I will try and walk outside for one trip to go back to my office. So it is important that buildings have an outside area, that you are not just closed in in a fixed environment, and that people can use that outside area. I will turn to another subject. You spoke about targets, particularly for us looking at this sustainability charter. I am opposed to targets, even though it may give something concrete for people to go on. You might have one department that is absolutely mad keen on green waste for a worm farm. You may have another department that is more interested in power usage. You do not want to say to any department, 'Here, you have to do all these things.' Do you know what I mean? If we have a sustainability charter that is totally flexible—and you can comment on what I say—we might have criticism that it has no teeth and questions about why we have bothered doing it. I would rather have a charter which is just that—a charter for the community allowing that community to set its own goals and relying on the mirror approach that I talked about before of inspiring enthusiasm in the individual to make the change that then drives the road back to the sustainability charter.

**Mr Tucker**—I think there is some wisdom in being careful about targets. There is a very practical example. If we said to the Australian Antarctic Division they had to decrease their fuel usage by 20 per cent, well, the ship might not quite make it there and back. You do have to be careful about those things.

**CHAIR**—What we would love you to do, if you could, is put a submission in regarding this charter addressing perhaps Jennie's question and alluding to some of Russell's thoughts to assist us in where you think we should take this charter. We have had some very good submissions. I am not sure what we are up to.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Just to make a point about how many submissions we have had: this is one volume; Jennie has the other volume.

**Mr Tucker**—That is a lot of interest.

**CHAIR**—There are 82 submissions so far. I think there are more to come. What we really want to do is get some input in terms of Jennie's issue and Russell's issue to get some sort of idea from the department's point of view. If we do all this work, what would be a useful model, because you have had a lot of experience on the ground trying to sell ideas and concepts? What sorts of tools would you like to see in the charter that are realistic for us to achieve?

**Mr Tucker**—We will certainly take that on board and take that back to the department.

**Mr BROADBENT**—We would really appreciate some guidance.

**Ms GEORGE**—Can you throw any light on when the government might respond to the earlier report, *Sustainable cities*?

**Mr Tucker**—We are actually taking the lead and coordinating the response for the government across departments. We are pretty close to doing a final draft with the input from all government agencies. Once we have done that, we will be presenting it to the government. In terms of our work, it is probably a month or so off. It is up to the government whether they think we have done a good job in the first place and how that sits with the time frame in responding.

**Mr BROADBENT**—I see that report that you are about to deliver to government as perhaps a very strong launching pad for the charter. But that response is very important as to where we are headed with the charter.

**Mr Tucker**—Yes. We are certainly doing what we can.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, Mark. Any more questions?

**Ms GEORGE**—Congratulations on that report.

**CHAIR**—Yes. It is good.

**Mr Tucker**—I should probably acknowledge Paul. A lot of this is Paul's work. I am very happy to put on the public record the work that Paul Starr has put into this.

**Mr BROADBENT**—Congratulations, Paul. We will call on you again. You can be sure of that.

**Dr Starr**—Are you hearing or have you heard from Centrelink? Have they appeared?

**Mr BROADBENT**—No.

**Dr Starr**—I think they have some excellent experience that they have been very quiet about but that would be quite useful.

**Ms HOARE**—We can specifically ask Centrelink for a submission.

**CHAIR**—We will get on to Centrelink and find out. Thank you.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Hoare**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 11.22 am**