

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria

Melbourne—Wednesday, 16 June 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Sonja Terpstra—Chair

Mr Clifford Hayes—Deputy Chair

Dr Matthew Bach

Ms Melina Bath

Dr Catherine Cumming

Mr Stuart Grimley

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Cesar Melhem

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Nina Taylor

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Georgie Crozier

Mr David Davis

Dr Tien Kieu

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

WITNESSES

Dr Andrea Lindsay, Member, and

Ms Sophie Small, Facilitator, Bellarine Landcare Group.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee public hearing for the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the traditional custodians of the various lands which each of us are gathered on today and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I would also like to welcome any members of the public who may be watching these proceedings via the live broadcast as well.

I will just take this point in time to introduce committee members to you. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. Also with us is Mr Clifford Hayes, who is the Deputy Chair. Also joining us via Zoom are Dr Samantha Ratnam, Mr Andy Meddick, Mr Cesar Melhem and Mrs Bev McArthur.

All evidence that is taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, if you could please state your name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Dr LINDSAY: I am Dr Andrea Lindsay, and with our facilitator I am here representing the Bellarine Landcare Group.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms SMALL: And my name is Sophie Small, and I am the facilitator of the Bellarine Landcare Group.

The CHAIR: Great. Thanks so much. So with that, I will ask you to make your opening comments. If you could please keep them to about 5 or 10 minutes, that way it will allow committee members plenty of time to ask questions. If I could also just ask everybody else who is on this call if you could please mute your microphones when you are not speaking, that will help to keep down any background noise. And if you have any technical difficulties, just disconnect and reconnect, but our secretariat will help and assist if that is the case. With that, I will hand over to you—5 or 10 minutes, and we will go from there. Thank you.

Dr LINDSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Bellarine Peninsula has recently been declared a distinctive area and landscape. The peninsula hosts a large diversity of ecosystems. Past vegetation clearing, draining of wetlands, weed and pest invasion and loss of Aboriginal management have modified its biodiversity and left a mere fragment of what was once present. Past threats continue. Added to these are accelerating urban sprawl and visitor pressures. The Bellarine Landcare Group demonstrates actions that can halt and reverse this loss. It has achieved a great deal with modest resources. Key factors in its success are tapping community resources, strong and able leadership, government support for our professional facilitator, our Indigenous-plant nursery, education and good lines of communication, and cooperation with other conservation groups and public land managers.

Over the last year our projects have involved over 700 participants and 31 events, and that despite COVID - some using webinar or Zoom. These have included protection of 5.2 hectares of remnant farm trees, weed and rabbit control education, working bees, restoration of grasslands and wetlands, biolink planning, Ramsar wetland awareness, rail trail signage and revegetation, propagation and planting of over 60 000 native plants, educational monthly meetings and walks and talks, and whole-farm planning courses. Our facilitator conducted 90 visits to local landholders providing advice on pest control, vegetation and sustainable agriculture. We reach a broad community through social media and monthly newsletters.

We now wish to comment briefly on matters that limit our effectiveness and how these may be overcome. Our members act to reverse loss of biodiversity, but without strong non-discretionary regulation their efforts can easily be frustrated. Short-term and private commercial gain is constantly given priority over conservation values. It is disheartening to know that a change of land ownership can undo all our work. Further, each development or planning application is assessed in isolation of context such as road surfaces and fire hazard. The interconnectedness of ecosystems requires that decisions about land use take account of context. Buffer zones should be required between new developments and native ecosystems. Restoring linkages between isolated patches of native vegetation should be given a high priority. Wetlands and streams linked to Ramsar wetlands should be given similar protection to the Ramsar wetlands themselves. Roadside remnant vegetation should be sacrosanct. Conservation covenants should be enforced, with no options to set them aside for the convenience of new owners. Action needs to be taken in popular visitor destinations to ensure that activities do not exceed ecological carrying capacity.

Funding of positive conservation effort is also important. Seeking funding is time-consuming and arduous. Funds assist rather than cover costs and are usually only for short periods. This funding approach does allow local people to identify and plan important conservation actions, but better and more efficient ways should be found to match funds with projects. In the first place, programs to meet conservation objectives should be defined by government in collaboration with informed community groups and with time frames to match the needs of the environment. Discrete projects can then be identified by government or community groups to further programs. Funding should be adequate to ensure that projects are brought to a successful completion. Currently we spend excessive time on funding applications, and we propose a more efficient approach. Government bodies can define clear criteria for projects and call for brief expressions of interest. From these a shortlist of applicants can be invited to provide detailed proposals.

The current inadequate funding model is particularly relevant to Landcare facilitators. Short-term funding belies the ongoing need for these invaluable people. We are fortunate indeed that our extremely able Landcare facilitator is prepared to tolerate continual employment uncertainty. Facilitators should be provided for all Landcare groups, or at least regional Landcare networks, preferably be full time and with at least six-year contracts and adequate on-costs provided. Thank you. That is my opening statement.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much for that, Dr Lindsay. All right, we will open it up to questions. Mr Hayes, over to you.

Mr HAYES: Thank you very much. Thanks, Dr Lindsay and Ms Small. I have been reading your submission. It is very comprehensive. There are a couple of things that I am interested in. You talk about urban sprawl and the effects it has on the ecosystem. Something that I am very interested in is putting the environment first as a planning consideration. I am just wondering how you think we could best contain the urban sprawl. I am someone who does not support the idea of rapidly growing the population all the time for economic purposes—we have got to put the environment before the economy in some way—and I am just wondering how you could see us best containing that urban sprawl that has really had a huge impact on the Bellarine Peninsula and Surf Coast Shire.

Dr LINDSAY: Thank you. First of all, I would like to make the point that I do not think we see biodiversity as contradictory to economic wellbeing. The environment needs to be protected if we are to have a sustained economy. Now, going on to actually containing the urban sprawl, there were some interesting points that came up with the process of looking at the distinctive landscapes and areas, and they may be incorporated into the future state planning policy. In particular we have now defined settlement boundaries. These probably need to be pulled back a little bit, because they take in a lot of the coastal vegetation. But in the first instance the appropriate thing would be to look at infill in existing towns. Then the settlement boundaries should definitely be held as 'That is where settlement occurs and not beyond this', with consideration within those also of protecting—in our case we have got some very attractive biodiversity within those, and they enhance the towns as well as maintaining the biodiversity resource.

There seems really probably little excuse for any settlement outside these boundaries. If there were such pressures in a setting where it might be needed, then the cumulative effects of any settlement on a so-called greenfield settlement should be considered, not each one separately. Also there are quite a few other considerations, like they should be away from where there is a fire risk to minimise that; they should minimise any impacts on the hydrology; there should be buffers between them and important areas of biodiversity; and also whether there can be allowance for corridors. In our area, of course, we have got to think of hydrology very much and the coast and wetlands as well as soil. And one other thing that really is a bit outside the scope of this is that we should be doing something about retaining high-quality farmland for production. Does that meet your question?

Mr HAYES: Thank you. I just wanted to ask you also about the issue of covenants, and I take the point that VCAT has made it a lot easier to overturn covenants over recent years. I wonder whether you believe that a more extensive use of enforceable covenants is a way of going forward to protect farmland and native bush in private ownership?

Dr LINDSAY: Well, a simple answer to that would be yes, and they should actually be enforced. I am not a lawyer, so how that would be best introduced in detail—at least I think that the person who set up the covenant should have the right of appeal on any effort to overturn one. But strictly they should not be overturned anyway. It is hard to see any reason why they would be. And they have certainly undermined our efforts to restore and protect vegetation. It is very disheartening and discouraging to know that all your work can be undone just because someone, a new owner, decides they do not like the covenant.

Mr HAYES: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Dr Ratnam.

Dr RATNAM: Thank you so much, Dr Lindsay, for your written submission and your presentation today. I want to follow up on something you raised in your verbal submission, which you touched on in your written submission too, regarding the funding model. You indicated that there were some issues with the current funding model. You talked about how there needs to be better matching of funding with projects and excessive time spent on funding applications and submissions for securing funding. I am wondering if you can expand a bit more on what is happening at the moment, what is going wrong with that funding model and what kinds of implications that has for the type of work that you would ideally like to be doing on the ground.

Dr LINDSAY: I will start on that, but I will hand over to Sophie because she has a lot more knowledge of particular projects. The first thing I would like to comment on is about the funding of the facilitators themselves. This has really been something that has taken over from in the past when we had extension officers and we had enforcement. Well, it was inspection and then discussion with landholders—I am going back quite a bit here—on weed management and pest management. We had quite a lot of government staff, so there was a fair bit of money there, and the money has essentially been withdrawn and put into very short-term payments to facilitators who are part-time and have a lot of other duties, so it really seems a bit of a cheapskate approach to saving government money. That is a personal opinion, by the way. The facilitators are on, at best, three-year contracts part time. We are fortunate that we have one dedicated to our group, whereas in other areas a facilitator may have to look after quite a number of groups. It is really an impossible situation. Their time is largely taken up in that situation with applying for funding rather than actually being able to do anything with the landholders. As for the rest, perhaps you would like to repeat a little bit of that question so Sophie can take it up from me.

Dr RATNAM: Sure. Thanks very much. That goes to answering some of my question. I was also wondering what are the funding issues doing to your ability to actually conduct the types of projects you would like to be seeing on the ground—so if the funding issues were not there, what more could you be doing?

Ms SMALL: I guess it is really a matter of matching government priorities with local priorities, and sometimes it can be tricky to do that because on-ground people may be wanting to be doing certain things that may not quite match. But I think the real thing with grant applications is having a team of people. We are lucky with the Landcare group that we have actually got a great team who are highly skilled in writing grant applications in recent years, and we are getting increasingly successful at being able to secure the funding, but I think where Landcare groups do not have access to that support and skill in grant writing it is extremely time

consuming putting in applications. Even if you have a really great idea and the skills to implement it, actually the days and days it takes to put that funding submission together are really time consuming and not a great use of time.

We have recently had a good funding submission through the federal government Communities Environment Program, where it first sought an expression of interest, so we were able to put in an expression of interest for protection of remnant paddock trees on the Bellarine Peninsula, and then the expression of interest was accepted and we were able to submit more details. Rather than spending days putting together the application it received the tick of approval and then we were able to submit more detail, so that was a good way to proceed.

Dr LINDSAY: I might add one more point there. While we have been securing funding, it is not always as much as we have asked for and actually identified as needed, and that can compromise the completion of a project. Particularly it can compromise what should be happening, which is strong monitoring and recording of results so that we actually learn and do better in the future.

Dr RATNAM: Great. Thank you so much. I have one further question, if I may. Your work in private land conservation is a really important one for this inquiry. We have not done a lot of inquiry into it but we are going to in the future hearings. I was wondering if you could expand on your work. For example, I wanted to ask if you have done any work with Trust for Nature? Do think there needs to be more support for Trust for Nature in terms of the covenants work? You also talked about covenants and a concern that covenants could be taken off, and I wanted you to expand on what the issues are that are happening there, because we have heard from previous witnesses, for example, that there is not enough work to do the covenants work, so there are actually areas that could be covenanted, but Trust for Nature, for example, do not have enough funding to be able to go and do that work. So I would like you to expand on your experience with the covenants process.

Dr LINDSAY: I will start there and then I think I will hand over to Sophie, because she has had a very good idea she has been discussing with the City of Greater Geelong. There could be an additional process where the private landholder is restoring native vegetation for a range of reasons on their properties. It may be that it actually is to restore ongoing ecosystems for biodiversity reasons, it may be that that is combined with other things or it may be there is a primary objective of say a wood lot, a plantation. Shelterbelts often will combine many values, and in a simple process this could be identified, recorded with a local council, and where the intention is actually to restore ecosystems these could be given the same status as existing ecosystems, but where there are other purposes there will be a permission to actually fell or use the wood lots or whatever. This could be a simplified process. Particularly, I think, we also have to consider where there is public funding gone into some of this work. That should not be something squandered just because of a change of hands. That also needs to be recorded. Sophie perhaps could expand on the proposal she is thinking through with the City of Greater Geelong.

Ms SMALL: Yes. Thank you, Andrea. First of all I just wanted to say we have got a really close relationship with Trust for Nature on the Bellarine Peninsula. We have worked with them on education around Ramsar wetlands, and we also work closely with them in handballing landholders who want to put covenants on their properties to the Trust for Nature team. Trust for Nature I think is a really wonderful organisation, and if you could speak to them directly that would provide the best context for their experience. But I think covenants have been certainly a way that local landholders have gone in protecting remnant vegetation or revegetation sites on their properties.

In addition to that, Andrea I think was indicating some biolinks planning we have been doing with Trust for Nature, City of Greater Geelong, Bellarine Catchment Network and other local organisations in actually planning where appropriate biolinks might take place on the Bellarine Peninsula. We have mapped out where the local remnants are and how they might be connected through vegetation corridors and what different species those corridors might support. So that kind of planning, which is still in process, will provide a bit of a vision for conserving and working towards restoring biodiversity on the Bellarine, but also the excellent benefits for farming in providing shelterbelts and integrated pest management and such like. Vegetation has so many multiple purposes, not just for protection of biodiversity but also for sustainable agriculture.

Dr RATNAM: Great. Thank you so much.

Mr MELHEM: Thank you, Chair. Just following on from that, are you able to sort of tell us about how you influence conversation outcomes with landowners in relation to: what sort of advice are you able to give them and support in relation to conservation generally? So how do you describe the relationship and what roles you

play with private landowners? And the second part of the question is what sort of additional resources you might need to encourage private landowners to conserve biodiversity values. So it is a sort of two-part question. I am interested in your view on that.

Dr LINDSAY: I am just going to make a little start on that. Old age has its advantages, because I can actually remember 40 and 50 years ago where the farmers were the leaders. Not all of them of course, but many recognised the value of their bushland then—shelterbelts, their wetlands—and they were actually so actively pursuing information from government departments. I was working at Monash University at the time; we were asked if we would assist in writing a book that could be given to farmers to help them plan this. They wanted to do this restoration of what we were calling woody vegetation, but we would call it biodiversity now, and there was nothing available. That has changed, but farmers—the good, I must say, successful farmers, the forward-thinking ones—do not actually need much persuasion. We have actually got quite a lot of new, I would say, part-time farmers, hobby farmers and small blockies that are also interested but uncertain. And then at the other end there are those who are perhaps ignorant or have short-term thinking that do need some convincing. But we do not really need to think that we have discovered everything recently. There is a lot of goodwill and enthusiasm that needs the sort of support and assistance that Sophie gives, so I am going to hand over to Sophie now.

Ms SMALL: Thanks, Andrea. Our community nursery provides a great entry point for local landholders in the purchase of indigenous plants for revegetation on their properties. The primary purpose is not sales, although we do sell around 60 000 plants a year, but is really that community engagement and education. Often landholders will come into the nursery asking about plants, and then our nursery coordinator will pass those people on to me. I might do a property visit and look at weeds, rabbits and what they would like to do with their properties and how we might advise and support them in that direction. The Bellarine is a changing landscape. Because property is so valuable, we are getting properties being subdivided and sold off in 30-hectare blocks. So it is a changing landscape, from a traditional farming landscape to many smaller landholdings, but a lot of these landholders are really keen to learn how to manage their properties well and there is a lot of fresh and good positive energy coming in—people really wanting to do the right thing about managing their properties carefully and with awareness of land management issues—so that is a good thing. We are actually inundated with people who really want support and advice, and meeting that need can be challenging.

Mr MELHEM: Just to move on—

Dr LINDSAY: There was a second part—

Mr MELHEM: Sorry?

Dr LINDSAY: There was a second part to your question.

Mr MELHEM: What sort of support you might need to basically improve—but I think Sophie sort of touched on that. My next question is: do you see any sort of improvement that can be made between the various levels of government—basically local, state and federal governments—and yourselves about how we can achieve a better outcome for biodiversity and having a better ecosystem? Have you got any thoughts on where things are working well or not working well? I know it is a big question, and you can take it on notice if you do, but I am interested in your view on what sorts of things can be done.

Dr LINDSAY: Personally, I may have to take that on notice, because I have been away from the public service and local government and the others for a while. But one thing I am very much aware of and I do not think has changed is that there is simply inadequate funding and inadequate staff to do the job that these government agencies and local governments and so on need to do. Relatively speaking, I think it has been quite strongly reduced from the past, in particular not just informing but enforcing the law. So there is a considerable amount of illegal behaviour or skating the legalities of behaviour. I am thinking of things like we are required to destroy our noxious weeds, our rabbits, our gorse and so on. It does not happen very often. It may not be enforced. But there are other illegal things that happen that are just, well, skated over or a bit of a slap on the wrist or not done at all, and the staff simply are not there to do the job. I think Sophie should expand on that. She is much closer to the situation than I am.

Ms SMALL: We have a really good relationship with the City of Greater Geelong, their natural reserves team. We work closely with them on education around rabbit control, weed control. We have contacts with

Agriculture Victoria. So I think there is a fair degree of cooperation, but, as Andrea mentioned, I think those departments are understaffed. They lack the capacity to follow up and enforce, except in extreme circumstances. So, yes, I would definitely like to see more resourcing of government departments to be able to support us to do the on-ground connection with landholders. I guess we are doing the communication, but to actually have the enforcement from government would be really something that could take things to the next level.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Mr Meddick.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, both, for your extensive answers today. They have been fantastic. Look, I just wanted to cover something that has been broached by a lot of other witnesses as well, and that is the subject of offsets. The problems that have been raised by many witnesses that we have had are that they are just not adhered to or they are not enforced to begin with and that they are shiftable. In other words, when an offset area is identified and agreed to by a developer, if that area itself becomes desirable to another developer, then the offset is moved, so it is not realised. And also where they are respected, they are often not realised until decades later. Often with trees or vegetation that take 50, 60, 100 years to grow that are knocked down for a development, an offset area is just declared somewhere that is just a vacant paddock and they might plant some trees there that are not like for like, for instance. So if we are getting rid of yellow box, for instance, not yellow box are replanted in that area. So the realisation, if you like, of that offset just does not happen.

Are you of the opinion, in that context then, that offsets need to be scrapped entirely and replaced with a system whereby if there is a specific area of protection that needs protection within a development site, then the developer is forced to respect that area and cannot develop that piece of land? Moreover, the protection around that also includes no drainage into that area, because we have seen a specific problem with the Lake Connewarre system when the City of Greater Geelong introduced the new growth area in Armstrong Creek, where we had an enormous amount of weeds and noxious species of plants as part of the drainage system. They had to shut down part of the system, cut it off, drain it, get backhoes in, get rid of all of that vegetation and then replace the water, at enormous cost. But that was all because a developer wanted a particular piece of land and then it was rushed through. So I guess I am asking: is it your opinion, then, that those areas be respected and that under legislation better protections around the development that might occur around those areas need to be in place?

Dr LINDSAY: Thank you. I did not know about that particular situation you described; it sounds quite horrible. The thing is that the present situation is that if somebody wants to develop housing or commercial estates with it, that seems to just take priority. It is short-term gain—it is presumably extra rates—and it overrides every other consideration. Now, getting back to the principle of offsets, for starters, I think that should be a last resort. Perhaps we keep it there if there is no other option—a stand of trees perhaps is dangerous or there are absolutely overwhelming reasons for removing not just trees of course; it could be a wetland, any ecosystem—but certainly not the first consideration. The first consideration should be: why disturb it at all? If it is something of value, then go somewhere else. There is plenty of other land that has not got that kind of value. The private interests of a developer should not be put before the wider interests of the community and its biodiversity.

The other thing is that on the Bellarine and in many other areas there simply are not areas where offsets could be grown in any meaningful way. Destroying an ecosystem really is foolish and a last resort because it simply may not even be possible to reinstate it. Just growing a few trees somewhere else is not reinstating an ecosystem. For starters, when you knock down this biodiversity area there are a lot of plants, animals, insects and soil damaged, killed, starved, and they will not be reproducing even if they survive. These are not reproduced by growing some trees somewhere else. So really the concept of offsets—I understand it was largely developed as an idea of carbon sinks being replaced. If we are looking at actual biodiversity and functioning ecosystems, then any restoration has to involve restoring the whole process of that ecosystem, and it really cannot. If you have destroyed the plants and animals, they are gone. So as I said it is a last resort, perhaps to be kept, but the first principle should be that we do not go in with the bulldozers destroying the biodiversity in the first place.

Mr MEDDICK: Great. Thank you. That to me is exactly the point that I quite expected you to be making—when you destroy these areas there are a whole host of different species that may well be particular to that area, like lizards, for instance. I mean, you go from ground level upwards; microbial aspects of the soils cannot be just picked up and moved somewhere else or replaced. They might exist only in that particular area.

Dr LINDSAY: I am very glad you mentioned soils because they are important ecosystems in their own right.

The CHAIR: If I could just interrupt you for one second, we have got about 3 minutes left on this session. If you want to keep going, I am happy to cede my question for the next session, although I am not sure whether you have got any other questions. But Dr Lindsay, please continue.

Dr LINDSAY: Well, actually, I think probably the sensible thing rather than extending your time excessively would be, if there are any other questions, to take them on notice and give replies that way.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. I will just quickly go to Mrs McArthur. Mrs McArthur, have you got a very short question, because we have got about 3 minutes left? And I just remind committee members if you do have any additional questions for these witnesses, we can provide them on notice.

Mrs McARTHUR: I am most interested in the issue of grant writing. It has become an industry, and I think we could probably abolish it.

Anyway, the other area is the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve, which when I visited it was a bushfire waiting to happen—350 acres of land not properly managed. Some work has been done recently, but if we are going to set up these reserves everywhere, either we should be able to manage them or we should not set them up in the first place because it is just inept to have situations in urban areas where they are a fire risk. But I am just interested, do you have a lot of philanthropists interested in what you do? If people are concerned about this, then surely they would happily put their money where their mouth is?

Dr LINDSAY: I think I will let Sophie take that last question first and then I will come back to the issue of fire hazards.

Ms SMALL: Thank you for the question. I think there would be a lot of philanthropists who are interested in contributing to this area. I really think, though, that is a whole lot more staffing, too. The skills of actually putting together proposals and then approaching those philanthropists, it is something that we have certainly considered and would like to do, but we would need extra support and resourcing to actually carry that out. I know Trust for Nature are very good at that. That is where they get the majority of their funding. They have a whole office of people who are dedicated to doing that work. So I think it is a good idea, and I know Landcare Victoria Inc. have recently received some high-level funding through philanthropists. There is certainly a willingness there. It is a matter of having the resources to tap it.

Dr LINDSAY: Thanks. Have I got time to just come back to the fire issue briefly?

The CHAIR: Yes, very briefly.

Dr LINDSAY: Right. Thanks. First, in an area like this, where there is a lot of cleared land and exotic pastures, the greatest risk is going to be grassfires. And the other thing is that these exotic grasses that are particularly hazardous can provide a wick, carrying the fire into bushland. But the point I would like to make—it is a bit late for the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve—is where there is a perceived and identified fire hazard the best thing to do is keep the housing away from it and leave a buffer there. Exotic grasses are particularly dangerous, but the native grasses that stay green and are often lower could be kept in that buffer. And the third thing I would like to point out there is that we have some very wise people, the First People, who could be teaching us a great deal more about managing fire not as a perceived and dreadful threat but as a tool, but they need resources to advise and help us.

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes. Everybody needs more money.

Dr LINDSAY: Yes, and also I think that is the core of facilitation thing. The person to raise capacity, yes, it is money, but it is also having the right people in place. There is a great deal of interest to learn, but it is a great impost on our First People, a small community, to actually do everything, and I think they do need assistance to do that.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thanks so much for your evidence, Dr Lindsay and Sophie, today. It has been fantastic. I would like to thank you very much for your contribution.

Witnesses withdrew.