Chief Minister
Question Time Briefs
August 2021

Ref No	Page number	Title	Status	Reason for Exemption
1	2	Cost-of-Living Measures and Support for Vulnerable Households	Full	n/a
2	7	Latest Stamp Duty Cuts and Housing Affordability	Full	n/a
3	10	Latest Industry Support Measures – Tourism Operators and Accommodation Providers	Full	n/a
4	12	Return of International Students to Canberra	Full	n/a
5	14	SES Pay and FTE (Upcoming Remuneration Tribunal Decision) Relates to QON Response 293 – ACTPS Executive Pay	Full	n/a

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Add reference number

Portfolio/s: Chief Minister

ISSUE: COST-OF-LIVING MEASURES AND SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE HOUSEHOLDS

Talking points:

- Canberra is a great place to live, work, study and raise a family with most people enjoying among the highest living standards in the country. But there are some in our community on low and fixed incomes where cost of living pressures weigh more heavily.
- The ACT Government has a range of discounts, rebates and subsidies to support Canberrans who most need a helping hand. This includes concessions for living expenses such as general rates, utility bills, driver licence fees, motor vehicle registration fees and public transport fares.
- In the recent and unprecedented times more Canberrans have needed greater assistance as a result of the compounding impacts of bushfire, smoke, hail damage and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To support households, the Government has offered a range of temporary and one-off household support initiatives over the past 18 months, in addition to permanent support measures provided through our ongoing concessions program. In 2020-21 those measures included:
    - A freeze on a number of ACT Government fees and charges, including the fire and emergency services levy, public transport, vehicle registration and parking fees.
    - An additional one-off $200 rebate for low-income households receiving the Utilities Concession.
    - Rebates of $150 on residential rates to help ease cashflow pressures for Canberra households. For around 110,000 residential property owners rates did not increase in 2020-21.
- Following rates relief provided last year, average residential rates will increase for the first time in two years in 2021-22. However, we have continued to make the general rates system more progressive by ensuring that lower income and lower wealth households will be paying a smaller proportion of total general rates revenue.

Cleared as complete and accurate:		
Cleared by: Kim Salisbury	Executive Group Manager	Ext: 70010
Contact Officer name:	Kathy Goth	Ext: 50772
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
Cleared for release	Yes	
Information Officer name:	Nathan Brown	
TRIM Ref:		

- Additionally, many fixed income pensioner households will receive a larger rebate through the increase to the Pensioner General Rates Rebate cap by $50 to $750 from 2021-22.
- The Government also recognises that energy bills are a substantial part of ACT households' cost of living expenses. As an immediate response to recent increases in the average standing offer electricity price, the Government has:
    - provided direct financial support to around 31,000 lower and fixed income households by permanently increasing the annual Utilities Concession by $50 to $750 annually;
    - provided an additional one-off $50 increase to the Utilities Concession for 2021-22, taking the 2021-22 rebate to $800;
    - contributed $1 million to the Utilities Hardship Fund over four years;
    - established a co-governed energy literacy and education program with the community sector with a $950,000 contribution over four years; and
    - permanently expanded access to the Utilities Concession to all those who hold an ACT Services Access Card.
- The Government is also taking longer term action to assist Canberrans to lower their energy bills.
    - From 1 October 2021, electricity retailers will be required to compare their offers against a common benchmark, and let customers know if a better offer is available.
    - An interest-free loan scheme has been launched to support installation of energy-saving appliances, solar panels and batteries in Canberrans' homes and it will shortly be rolled out to all eligible Canberra households.
- As part of our ongoing tax reform program, the ACT is also the first and only state or territory to abolish Insurance Duty – removing a duty as high as 10 per cent from insurance products. This saves a household that spends $4,000 on insurance products $400 a year.

Cleared as complete and accurate:

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- Additionally, ongoing reform of Compulsory Third Party insurance, including the introduction of the new Motor Accident Injuries Scheme from 1 February last year, has seen MAI insurance premiums continue to fall. Over the last 3 years from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2021, ACT Compulsory Third-Party / Motor Accident Injuries average passenger vehicle premium (Non-ITCE) fell from $550.48 to $437.73, a reduction of $112.75 or 20.5 per cent.

Key Information

Table 3.3.1: Summary of assistance available and estimated costs of annual take up in 2019-20 and 2020-21

Assistance	Description	Estimated annual take up[1]	2019-20 $'000	2020-21 $'000
Ongoing support				
General rates and Fire and Emergency Services Levy rebate	50 per cent rebate of annual rates bill up to $700, $98 rebate on FESL.	14,800 households	10,300	11,100
Spectacles scheme	Subsidy up to $200 once every two years.	10,500 spectacles	2,000	2,100
Taxi Subsidy scheme	Assistance for people with a disability or significant mobility restriction.	90,900 trips	2,100	1,900
Motor Vehicle Registrations	Discounts on motor vehicle registration.	44,500 vehicles	5,500	4,700
Driver Licence concessions	Up to a 100 per cent fee discount on driver licences.	39,500 licences	870	750
Public Transport concessions	Reduced or free fares on Transport Canberra bus and light rail services.	3.2 million trips	7,150	5,200
Utilities concessions	$700 per year towards utility bill.	31,100 households	20,900	21,800
Conveyance duty concessions	Up to 100 per cent discount on conveyance duty payable.	4,700 households	45,300	60,100
Temporary support				
Residential rates 2020-21 setting	Zero per cent increase in average residential rates for 2020-21 after $150 rebate.	170,000 households	0	32,941
Residential tenancy relief	Land tax and rates rebates for landlords who reduced rents for affected tenants.	1,000 households	458	1,100
Stamp duty concessions for owner-occupiers	Duty concessions for owner-occupiers purchasing single dwelling blocks and lower value off-the-plan apartments.	900 home buyers	0	11,300

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Assistance	Description	Estimated annual take up[1]	2019-20 $'000	2020-21 $'000
Household utilities concession	Additional $200 rebate for households receiving the Utilities Concession.	31,100 households	7,000	0
Utilities concession for asylum seekers	$900 rebate for eligible asylum seekers.	80 households	0	72
Frozen taxes and charges at 2019-20 levels	Freeze, Fire and Emergency Services Levy	170,000 households	2,052	8,868
	Utilities Network Facilities Tax	271,000 car registrations		
	Vehicle registration fees	Over 1 million parking fees		
	Parking fees	9.9 million journeys		
	Public transport fees			
Hailstorm assistance	Stamp duty rebate of up to $100, refunds and rebates for some fees for eligible vehicles.[2]	7,600 refunds and rebates provided under the scheme	282	225
Total ongoing			**94,120**	**107,650**
Total temporary			**9,792**	**54,506**

Notes:

1. Around 9 per cent of homeowners receive a general rates and Fire and Emergency Services Levy rebate; 16 per cent of passenger vehicles and 12 per cent of driver licences receive a concession; 18 per cent of households receive the Utilities Concession; and 31 per cent of transactions benefit from an ongoing conveyance duty concession (due to different eligibility criteria). Estimated take up is based on year-to-date 2020-21 data and historic trends, or where appropriate 2019-20 data.
2. Refunds for registration cancellation and vehicle establishment fees, and rebates for road worthy inspection fees and basic identity inspection.

Background Information

<u>Rates Rebate and Deferral</u>

- Home owners in the ACT who receive a Commonwealth Government pension with entitlement to a Pensioner Concession Card, a Department of Veterans' Affairs or a War Veteran's pension, may be eligible for a rates rebate.
- From 2021-22, it is a 50 per cent rebate on your rates capped at $750 (a permanent increase of $50).
- In addition to receiving a rebate, home-owners in receipt of a Commonwealth Government pension can also apply to defer payment of all or part of the balance of total rates charges.
- Property owners aged 65 and over can also apply to defer payment of all or part of the balance of total rates charges provided that the property is their principle place of residence and they own at least 75 per cent equity in the home.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Utilities Concession

- The Government has permanently increase the annual Utilities Concession by $50 to $750 per annum from 2021-22, to provide direct financial support to around 31,000 low-income Canberra households.
    - Eligible applicants include: Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card holders, Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card holders, and Veteran's Affairs Pensioner Concession Card or Gold Card holders.

Other Utilities Assistance Measures

- Under the Sustainable Household Scheme, interest-free loans of up to $15,000 will be provided to households, to support installation of energy-saving appliances, solar panels and batteries in Canberrans' homes. The Sustainable Household Scheme was launched in mid-July 2021 after the ACT Government finalised arrangements with the loan provider, Brighte.

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Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

8

Portfolio/s: Chief Minister

ISSUE: Latest stamp duty cuts and housing affordability

Talking points:

- The Government recently announced further cuts to stamp duty, part of our long-term commitment to phasing out stamp duty and improving housing affordability in the ACT.
    - Phasing out stamp duty enables more first-home buyers and lower income and wealth households to to buy a home.
    - Phasing out stamp duty also makes it easier for people to move to a property that suits their current needs, such as a larger home for a growing family or a smaller age-friendly home for an older Canberran.
- From 1 July 2021, eligible owner-occupier purchasers no longer pay stamp duty on off-the-plan unit purchases up to $500,000. This includes unit-titled townhouses, as well as apartments.
    - This will save Canberrans buying an affordable home thousands of dollars in stamp duty, up to a maximum of $10,360 on a $500,000 property.
    - This will also encourage new affordable housing construction as it stimulates demand from purchasers for new properties below $500,000.
- Also, as part of stage 3 of our tax reform program, we are targetting our annual cuts to stamp duty tax rates at the lowest property value threshold, to provide the largest benefit to Canberrans purchasing affordable homes.
    - From 1 July 2021, stamp duty on all owner-occupier purchases between $200,000 and $1.455 million has reduced by $1,040. Duty on properties below $200,000 has almost halved from last year.

Cleared as complete and accurate:		
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Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
Cleared for release	Yes	
Information Officer name:	Nathan Brown	
TRIM Ref:		

- From 1 July 2021 we have also capped the duty concession available under the Home Buyer Concession Scheme to duty payable on a $1 million purchase ($34,024 in 2021-22).
    - This cap better targets this concession and the estimated saving has been used to provide larger cuts to Canberrans accessing affordable housing than would have been the case.

Key Information

Off-the-plan unit duty concession

Eligibility requirements include:

- contracts must be signed and exchanged on or after 1 July 2021
- at least one buyer must live in the home continuously for at least one year, starting within 12 months of the date of completion (date of settlement) of the off the plan agreement
- off the plan 'units' refers only to unit-titled apartments or townhouses.

Background Information

Off-the-plan units currently available for purchase for $500,000 or less

An Allhomes search on 28 July 2021 found 29 apartment developments that include off-the-plan units that are $500,000 or less.

Selected examples from each district are below (development name – location – price from – expected completion/construction commencing date):

- The Brooke – Bruce – from $319,000 to $500,000 (i.e. all units are $500,000 or less) – expected completion in 2022.
- The G6 – Gungahlin – from $299,900 – expected completion late 2022 to early 2023.
- Debut – Wright – from $299,900 – construction commencing 2021.
- DKSN – Dickson – from $384,900 – stage 1 sold out, expected completion on stage 2 in Q3 2022.
- The Griffin – Parkes – from $499,900 – expected completion end 2021.
- Aspen Village – Greenway – from $301,900 – stage 1 expected completion Q3 2022.
- W2 – Phillip – from $325,000 – expected completion mid-2023.

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Contact Officer name:	Kathy Goth	Ext: 50772
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
Cleared for release	Yes	
Information Officer name:	Nathan Brown	
TRIM Ref:		

STAMP DUTY ONE-PAGER FOR QUESTION TIME

PREPARED BY: CMO

- Two tables of key figures
- In addition to this is HBCS, pensioner duty concession scheme and current concessions for land and off-the-plan (below $500k full concession, $500k to $750k partial concession of $11,400). Can also foreshadow announcement of Stage 3 of Tax Reform.

	Stamp Duty payable at 1 July										Nominal savings since 2011	
Property price	**2011-12**	**2012-13**	**2013-14**	**2014-15**	**2015-16**	**2016-17**	**2017-18**	**2018-19**	**2019-20**	**2020-21**	**% reduction**	**$ reduction**
$300 000	$9 500	$8 550	$8 100	$7 500	$6 600	$5 460	$5 200	$4 900	$4 600	$4 600	52%	$ 4,900
$500 000	$20 500	$18 050	$17 100	$15 800	$14 600	$13 460	$12 800	$12 100	$11 400	$11 400	44%	$ 9,100
$700 000	$32 000	$29 050	$27 100	$25 800	$24 600	$23 460	$22 360	$21 200	$20 040	$20 040	37%	$ 11,960
$900 000	$43 500	$41 550	$39 350	$38 050	$36 850	$35 710	$34 200	$32 650	$31 050	$31 050	29%	$ 12,450

Source: ACTRO Website

Table 1: Estimates of stamp duty and insurance duty revenue with and without tax reform ($'000)[13]

Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Total
Residential sector								
Actual residential stamp duty	175,461	178,821	181,052	218,556	262,231	214,055	171,412	**1,401,588**
Counterfactual residential stamp duty	193,603	209,403	223,060	281,849	356,506	299,095	248,083	**1,811,599**
Difference in residential sector	**-18,142**	**-30,582**	**-42,008**	**-63,293**	**-94,275**	**-85,040**	**-76,671**	**-410,011**

Source: Revenue Neutrality of Tax Reform, August 2020, page 13

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM21/45685

Portfolio/s: Tourism

Economic Development

Latest Industry Support Measures – Tourism Operators and Accommodation Providers

Talking points:

- On 14 July 2021, a number of support measures were announced to support significantly impacted ACT tourism businesses as a result of the extended lockdown and travel restrictions due to the Sydney COVID-19 outbreak .
- The ACT Government will provide support of up to $75,000 for individual accommodation providers and $15,000 for small tourism operators.
- The tourism industry has been one of the hardest hit since the pandemic began and, while the local sector had been recovering, the recent developments in Sydney and subsequent travel restrictions from Victoria, have had a significant financial impact – particularly for accommodation providers and small tourism operators.
- A number of support measures will be made available to significantly impacted ACT tourism businesses:
    - Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator Support Program – up to $75,000; or
    - Small Tourism Operator COVID Recovery Payment – up to $15,000.
    - Hire car and charter bus registration fees waiver has been extended for six months from September 2021 to March 2022.
    - Two tourism industry funding programs (Tourism Cooperative Marketing Fund and COVID-Safe Tourism Co-investment Program) will be brought forward to open once restrictions are eased.

Key information

- Accommodation providers and tourism operators can choose between the Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator Support Program OR the Small Tourism Operator COVID Recovery Payment depending on the businesses' individual circumstances.
- Accommodation providers, events venues and private tourist attraction operators can apply for a rebate on their water and sewage fixed charge through the Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator Support Program:

Cleared as complete and accurate:	20/07/2021	
Cleared for public release by:	Executive Branch Manager	Ext: 53185
Contact Officer name:	Manasi Ahuja	Ext: 70215
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	

TRIM Ref:
CM21/45685

  - Around 90 accommodation providers and up to 20 privately operated tourism venues will be able to apply for the first two quarters of 2021-22, providing financial support of up to $75,000.
  - This will provide around $30,000 in financial support for an average sized accommodation provider.
  - To be eligible for the support, tourism businesses must be able to demonstrate 30 per cent loss of revenue in July 2021 compared to April 2021.
- Small tourism operator recovery payment:
  - Small tourism operators and operators likely to receive less than $15,000 under the Accommodation and Tourism Venue Operator support program can apply for this program.
  - To be eligible for the support, tourism businesses must be able to demonstrate 30 per cent loss of revenue in July 2021 compared to April 2021.
  - A range of expense types including ACT Government rates, fees and charges, fuel and mortgage repayments are eligible for reimbursement up to $15,000.
- Businesses are able to register their interest for both of these programs through an EOI on the Business Hub website.
- The current hire car and charter bus registration waiver provides assistance to around 40 local operators.
- The Tourism Cooperative Marketing Fund (TCMF) will offer $500,000 in funding, particularly encouraging collaboration between tourism operators and accommodation providers.
- There will be a new round of the TCMF offering $20,000 to projects led by accommodation providers (does not require matched funding).
- The $750,000 COVID-Safe Tourism Co-Investment Program will continue to encourage the development of new experiences to attract overnight visitors to Canberra.
- Both programs will open for applications once restrictions are eased with more information available soon.

Background information

- The Sydney lockdown has led to a significant reduction in visitors, particularly during the recent July school holiday period, and subsequent border closures and travel restrictions for visitors from Victoria have added to the losses.
- Travel from Sydney and regional NSW usually accounts for 65 per cent of domestic overnight visitors to the ACT, whilst visitors from Victoria make up approximately 20 per cent of domestic overnight visitors. Combined, these two markets provide 85 per cent of the ACT's domestic market.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM2021/1282

Portfolio/s: Economic Development

Return of International Students to Canberra

Talking points:

- The ACT Government recognises the social and economic value of international education to the ACT, and it remains committed to the return of international students when it is safe to do so.
- The ACT Government has been working with ACT based universities and the Australian Government to facilitate the safe return of international students for many months. The ACT Government was prepared to accept returns of international students as early as June 2020.
- We have noted the Commonwealth's endorsement last month of New South Wales' and South Australia's quarantine plans for international students, although New South Wales has since announced that it has paused its program given the current COVID-19 conditions.
- In response to the growing concerns of the spread of the 'Delta Variant', the Australian Government, with agreement from National Cabinet, has halved the international return caps for Australia. While this is primarily related to repatriating Australian citizens, it will also impact on capacity to return international students.
- Following lockdowns in NSW, VIC, and SA, the ACT has strengthened restrictions on all persons attempting to enter the ACT from identified COVID-19 hotspots, including students, who cannot otherwise demonstrate an essential need to enter the Territory.

Key Information

- The Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Canberra (UC) have worked closely with the ACT Government to develop international student return strategies since late-May 2020.
- Last month, 32 officials from PM&C, the Prime Minister's Office, the Australian Federal Police, Defence, and the media undertook quarantine in Davey Lodge at ANU, operated by UniLodge, on their return from the G7 Summit.
    - Davey Lodge's use for any future quarantine arrangements remains subject to review and approval by ACT Health and the Chief Health Officer.
- From 14 July 2021, the cap on international arrivals to Australia has been set at just over 3,000 per day, which will remain in place until 31 August 2021 and is subject to review.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	02/08/2021	
Cleared for public release by:	Executive Group Manager	
Contact Officer name:	Ash Balaretnaraja	Ext: 75282
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	
TRIM Ref:	CM2021/1282	

Return to Index

  - On 21 June 2021, the Minister for Health received a briefing on the measures taken to safely return ACT-enrolled, domestic university students who are currently in lockdown-affected areas.
  - ACT Health is currently managing the return of around 10 at risk students in hotel quarantine.

- The ANU has advised that it has approximately 650 on-shore students who have registered their interest to return to the ACT for study, with UC advising that it has approximately 90-100 students.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, international education was Canberra's largest export, valued at $1 billion by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2019.
- As of 27 April 2021, the ACT had repatriated a total of 936 Australian citizens and permanent residents, and facilitated 1,852 diplomats and government officials in a combination of home and hotel quarantine.

Background Information

- On 29 March 2021 you wrote to the Australian Government proposing a pathway that would allow for the return of international students alongside the return of Australian residents. On 17 June 2021 the Federal Minister for Education and Youth, the Hon. Alan Tudge MP wrote acknowledging the model proposed by the Territory and advised that he looks forward to receiving the Territory's detailed plan outlining arrangements for international student arrivals, while not displacing returning Australians.
- In June 2021, the Commonwealth approved plans submitted by New South Wales and South Australia to return international students in existing, non-hotel based accommodation.
  - New South Wales plans to use existing purpose-built student accommodation.
  - South Australia plans to use existing accommodation built for flight training at Parafield Airport in Adelaide's north.

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

CM21/47580

Portfolio/s: Chief Minister

SES Pay and FTE (upcoming remuneration tribunal decision) relates to QON response 293 – ACTPS Executive Pay

Talking points:

- As at 9 June 2021, there were 61 ACT Public Service Executive Service employees earning at least $327,000 per annum.
- This includes 8 executives with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate (JACS).
- The ACT Remuneration Tribunal determines remuneration for the Senior Executive Service. The Tribunal is currently reviewing the remuneration, allowances and other entitlements for executives. It is expected that a new Determination will be issued by the Tribunal in August 2021.
- The Head of Service is responsible for engagement and management of executives within the ACT Public Service.
- There are 304 executives within the ACT Public Service (at 30 June 2021).
- In April 2021, Mr Jon Peach moved from the ACT Corrective Services Commissioner role (Executive Level 2.4) to the Executive Group Manager, Security and Emergency Management (Executive Level 2.4).
- Mr Peach's classification level and salary rate have not changed.
- Emergency Services Deputy Commissioner Ray Johnson is acting as ACT Corrective Services Commissioner while a permanent recruitment process is undertaken.

Key Information

- On 4 March 2021, Minister Gentleman announced that the ACT Corrective Services Commissioner Jon Peach was taking on a new role within JACS.
- Mr Jon Peach was offered a long term contract in the position ACT Corrective Services Commissioner in April 2017.
- In April 2021, Mr Peach moved to the position Executive Group Manager Security and Emergency Management within JACS.
- The Executive Group Manager leads the Security and Emergency Management Division and is responsible for the development of strategic policy to support the government on all security and emergency management matters.
- As at 9 June 2021, there were 61 senior executives (12 Band 4 executives, 22 Band 3 executives and 27 Band 2 executives) earning at least $327,000 per annum.
- Of the 8 executives within JACS, 4 are at the Exceutive Level 2.4 classification.

Cleared as complete and accurate:	27/07/2021	
Cleared for public release by:	Deputy Director-General	Ext: 75397
Contact Officer name:	Russell Noud	Ext: 76019
Lead Directorate:	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development	

TRIM Ref: CM21/47580

Return to Index

- The Tribunal reviews remuneration, allowances and other entitlements for ACTPS executive on an annual basis. The current determination for Head of Service, Directors-General and Executives is Remuneration Tribunal Determination 2 of 2020.
- There are some statutory and non-statutory office holders, Judges, Magistrates, ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal members and medical specialists employed under ACT Public Sector Enterprise Agreements that earn above at least $327,000 per annum.

Background Information

- Minister Gentleman announced that the ACT Corrective Services Commissioner Jon Peach was taking on a new role within the Justice and Community Safety Directorate: Corrective Services Commissioner taking on new opportunity - Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (act.gov.au)
- In Late March 2021, the Office of the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services released its report into the review of the Riot and serious fires at the Alexander Maconochie Centre on 10 November 2020 (act.gov.au).
- Release of the report prompted subsequent media and Mr Peach's movement to a new role:
    - Ex-Canberra prison boss Jon Peach was moved out of the limelight as a critical riot report was emerging | The Canberra Times | Canberra, ACT
    - https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7152679/act-corrections-boss-dumped-amid-turmoil-around-jail-issues/
    - Prison riots investigation praises staff, criticises Peach | Canberra Weekly