

Certainly our recent experience, which has resulted in a refund of the mandatory inspection fee (a cool \$700 net approximately for a quick look), is evidence that the industry is pretty sloppy but well rewarded.

Reports are so qualified, with so many disclaimers they are pretty useless, and in our case completely superficial, missing major items of rotten timber obvious to even the most naive. The report was a carelessly word-processed document with mostly illegible attachments, providing little consumer protection. Buyers need to know they have redress under ACT legislation.

Peter Reece, Mawson

Lodge logic is fluffy

The Lodge is now ready for the PM to move back in ("Lodge interior renovation complete but no check-in date yet for PM", August 11, p1) after asbestos was removed from the 1927 home, the entire slate roof replaced, the heating and cooling system upgraded and new balcony balustrades added.

In a previous *CT* report, we learned asbestos had been found in many parts of the building, including the hot-water pipes, electrical conduits, sheeting in the attic and basement, in the laundry and the wet areas. There was also fibrous asbestos found in the sub-floor of the dining room.

What a contrast with the Mr Fluffy houses, which are all regarded as unsafe for habitation despite no asbestos fibres being detected in 40 to 50 per cent of them and only 10 per cent being "so badly contaminated that they are uninhabitable". \$92 million (about \$90,000 per house) was spent by the Commonwealth and ACT governments (in a program that ended in 1993) removing loose-fill asbestos from these houses.

Why is it that no amount of cleaning can be done to make Mr Fluffy houses safe (and they are deemed unsafe even when asbestos fibres can no longer even be detected) yet the PM's residence can be cleaned of extensive asbestos and be regarded as safe? If the The Lodge had been privately owned, would the ACT government have wanted it demolished?

J. B. O'Reilly, Palmerston

Hot air, no problem

David Fuller (Letters, August 11) takes Professor Andrew Blakers to task over his enthusiasm for reverse-cycle airconditioning as a suitable heating system for Canberra. If Mr Fuller's system operates as he claims, it needs to be serviced, because it is not sup-



Wattle they think of next to upset nature?

Canberra's nature parks and reserve offer many delights for the walker. At this time of the year, perhaps the greatest is the display of flowering wattles. *Acacia baileyana*, in particular, is now at its showy, glorious best. Yet in the Mount Pleasant and parts of the Mount Ainslie Nature Parks, someone has been felling and ringbarking these beautiful shrubs. We are a mere two hours' drive from Cootamundra, for which this wattle is named, yet the local plant police have declared the species "arbor non grata", an unwelcome invader! How ridiculous!

These short-lived shrubs are doing what wattles have evolved to do, act as pioneering species that colonise disturbed land, fix nitrogen and provide cover for longer-lived species such as eucalypts to establish.

They should be welcome in the Nature Parks for their beauty and as part of the natural plant succession, a sign of regeneration of what was formerly land cleared for grazing or degraded bush cut

over for timber or firewood.

The public-spirited people who turn out for park care projects do a great job in eliminating non-native plants such as briars, but plant purity can be taken too far. I implore you, when the primal urge to fell a wattle wells up in you, take a deep breath, retreat to your own native garden and practice your plant purity perversion in private! Please leave the wattles on public land alone.

Peter Randall, Campbell

Win for informal vote

Barbara Fisher (Letters, August 10) thinks informal votes are wasted. I disagree; they have a therapeutic effect.

When politicians say or do stupid or despicable things, it's comforting to know that one didn't vote for them.

I'd consider a formal vote if I found a candidate with sensible and humane policies. But there would still be potential problems: the distribution of preferences to other candidates, and non-core promises.

Mike Dallwitz, Giralang

posed to work that way.

My Daikin reverse-cycle airconditioner heats the house to my satisfaction. It is true that on a very cold and foggy morning the evaporator does freeze over and needs to be de-iced, but during this cycle the internal fans stop and no cold air blows inside the house.

If Mr Fuller's unit continues to blow air inside the house while the defrosting cycle is in operation, it needs to be fixed.

If seriously sub-zero and foggy outside, my system will heat for 20 minutes then stop blowing air for 10 minutes while it defrosts and then start again. We go from about 12 degrees at 6am to about 20 by 8am and it is still cheaper than the gas system I replaced it with 12 years ago.

George Beaton, Greenway

David Fuller is correct, but not

entirely. When living in northern Virginia 20 years ago the houses with reverse cycle heaters had electric heaters within the house heating system and worked fine in a one-metre snow dump and minus 10 degrees. There was no gas connected. We did have to shovel the snow off the external heat pump.

For those with a stand-alone reverse-cycle airconditioner in rare minus 4C days, just use an electric heater.

Geoff Davidson, Braddon

My ducted heat-pump system works fine in the foggy chill of Canberra on a reasonably sized house and despite the de-icing that occurs. This takes but a few minutes and no cold air flow is detectable inside. I've got good insulation treatment so haven't needed to run the heat at night. It gets cool but not cold. Irrespect-

struggled and delivered cold air at the extreme, but that was old tech.

F. Schelb, Chapman

I have a small, well-insulated house and the only heating I have is under-floor in the bathroom and laundry, and a small reverse-cycle airconditioner in the lounge room. I have been through two winters now and while I am always the first to complain about the cold at work, I am quite comfortable in my home. Perhaps it is more about the quality of the building and insulation than the reasons David Fuller give for the reverse-cycle airconditioners not working in Canberra.

E. Nelson, Wright

Pyne causes chest pain

Christopher Pyne should be declared a health hazard for all us pensioners on hypertension medication. His claim that "Bronwyn was felled in the most unfortunate circumstance" ("Bishop felled in most unfair circumstances", August 11, p5) is rubbish. She wasn't! Many of us will accept that the guidelines for MPs' entitlements are vague, but almost everyone, except, apparently Christopher and the PM, can see that Bishop's use of taxpayer funds was not "unfortunate", but completely unacceptable. Excuse me while I take another pill.

Mary Virr, Kambah

Shell's tax bottom line

Michael West's article about Shell not paying tax despite earning \$20 billion ("It's a Shell game when it comes to tax", *BusinessDay*, August 9, p8) begs the question: was it legal?

If so then the only conclusion one could come to is that our governments (our two major parties) allowing this to happen is tantamount to criminal negligence or incompetence at best, or worse still succumbing to some sort of political bribery.

If the tax avoidance/evasion is not legal then the ATO is clearly to blame for not enforcing the law. The government oversees the ATO so again the buck stops with them. In this case the problem can be fixed by the ATO revisiting these companies for audits and recovering the lost billions in tax.

Max Jensen, Chifley

Services Club solution

Couldn't the conundrum about the Canberra Services Club location be solved by allowing them to rebuild (in conjunction with a developer) on the same site. Or are there other more important issues, like money?

Steven Hurren, Macquarie