

In committee in continuation:

**MINISTER HENDERSON'S PORTFOLIOS
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, SPORT AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Good morning. I welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officers accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I am pleased to be here today in an interim capacity representing the previous minister, Jack Ah Kit, with the officers of the department who put the budget together this year. I will answer questions on major policy-related issues. Obviously, the chief executive officer and other departmental staff will talk about the detail of the programs.

Today I am here with Mike Dillon, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs - I am sure everybody knows Mike - and David Alexander, Chief Financial Officer, who is appearing for the first time before estimates. I hope it is not going to be too traumatic for you, David, and also other departmental heads.

The Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs is responsible for delivery of the government's program in Arts and Museums. The Chief Minister has carriage of this appropriation and invited questions a couple of days ago.

I will answer any questions in regard to Library and Information Services, and I direct the attention of committee members to page 191 of Budget Paper No 3. There you will see the division of Arts and Museums and Library Services. The output costs for Library and Information Services are distinct from the other costs in that division.

I will answer questions in regard to the scope of capital works programs in my portfolio. My colleague, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, yesterday would have answered questions in regards to the contractual details of capital works contracts for airstrips and barge landings administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

This department also delivers power, water and sewerage services to some 70 indigenous communities throughout the Territory. These essential services are funded by this department but will be delivered by the Power and Water Corporation. I will answer questions in relation to these services.

The 2004-05 financial year resulted in further investments by the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs and the achievements of long-term community development benefits across the Territory. During the past 12 months, the department has expanded delivery of key policy initiatives and objectives. To deliver new and existing initiatives requires increased resources, and it is for these reasons that the department's budget increased from \$218m to \$245m during 2004-05.

The appearance of a reduction in budget allocation between 2004-05 and 2005-06 is the result of a range of one-off additional projects, programs and asset costs during 2004-05 which are not expected to be experienced in 2005-06. These one-off costs have included the further support for the formation of regional councils through the provision of establishment grants as well as a range of capital grants for the development of sporting infrastructure throughout the Territory.

The budget for the department has increased during the past three years as a result of the government's increased attention to the portfolios administered by the department with the 2003-04 budget papers indicating the budget of \$204m up to \$218m in 2004-05 budget papers, and \$231m for 2005-06, as detailed in the current budget papers.

The *Building Stronger Regions Stronger Futures* strategy, released in May 2003, outlines a commitment to facilitate the establishment of regional authorities under the *Local Government Act* through the voluntary amalgamation of small councils and associations and negotiating more appropriate government structures. It envisages the progressive establishment of approximately 20 regional authorities to replace the 63 community government and association councils across the Territory.

This commitment will follow from the successful negotiation of a schedule of the Overarching Bilateral Agreement with the Australian government, which recognises that regional authorities will be a key mechanism for indigenous representation and service delivery at a regional level in a post-ATSIC

environment. Three regional authorities have been established: Tiwi Islands Local Government, Thamarrurr Regional Council and - Jack could do it better than I could – Nyirranggulung Mardrulk Ngadberre - and I am sorry, Mattie, if I do not have not that quite right - Regional Councils, and advanced negotiations are occurring in respect of forming other regional authorities at Anindilyakwa, West Central Arnhem, Top End Rural, with significant interest being pursued in respect to Alywarra, Barkly, East Arnhem and the Gulf.

The *Local Government Act* will be formally reviewed this year to ensure that the act provides a strong framework for the delivery of the government's *Stronger Regions Stronger Futures* policies into the future.

Indigenous economic development: the Territory government has hosted three forums aimed at exploring ways to achieve equitable economic outcomes for indigenous Territorians. The Chief Minister launched the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy on 25 May 2005. The strategy identifies opportunities for economic development in 13 industry sectors. Supporting measures for the implementation of the strategy will be ongoing.

Water safety: this government has been strongly committed to improving water safety in the Territory and I am pleased to announce that since the introduction of legislation, no children under five years of age have drowned in private swimming pools in the Territory. The NT has turned around from having the worst under five drowning record in Australia to the best.

Housing services and indigenous essential services: whilst this output receives appropriation of CSO payments, they are in turn forwarded to Territory Housing, the GBD. I would consider it appropriate, therefore, to deal with any questions relating to public housing under the Territory Housing outputs.

In respect of remote indigenous housing and infrastructure, this department aims to provide appropriate and adequate housing and economic infrastructure. The funding agency, the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, was established through a bilateral agreement between the Australian government and ATSIC and negotiations are under way to develop a new IHANT agreement. During 2005-06, some \$32.3m has been allocated for major upgrades and new construction, and \$10.5m to support housing organisations with the maintenance of housing stock.

The Indigenous Essential Services Policy 2005-10 was launched on 22 April this year and provides equitable and sustainable service provision to Territory-funded remote indigenous communities. The policy identifies a range of strategies required to address utility, transport, infrastructure and land servicing issues now and into the future.

The Community Harmony Strategy continues to respond to community concerns about the health and wellbeing of itinerant groups and the social harmony across the broader community. The strategy is a whole-of-government collaborative arrangement. This department was provided \$1.79m in 2004-05 to administer a range of funding grants to non-government community-based organisations under the Reduction of Itinerant Antisocial Behaviour Program, and this funding continues in 2005-06.

The Aboriginal Interpreter Service will continue to deliver crucial interpreter services in the health and legal arenas across the Territory.

Sport and Recreation: this government continues its excellent record of funding major sports events such as national basketball, AFL and netball games, and in upgrading and constructing new sports facilities. In 2005-06, construction of the new soccer stadium and the Palmerston Recreation Centre will commence and the final stage of the Traeger Park oval upgrade will be completed. \$800 000 will be provided to construct the new raceway for Alice Springs drag racing, and \$1.9m for ongoing remedial work and the construction of eight additional pit garages at the Hidden Valley Motor Sports Complex. Additional funding of \$300 000 has been provided to the NT Institute of Sport to assist elite athletes and the Sportsbiz service will continue to provide high level advice and assistance to peak sport and recreation organisations to strengthen their management and governance capacity.

Territory Housing: the Good Neighbour policy was introduced in 2004 as a tool to promote the message that everyone is entitled to the quiet enjoyment of their home. The policy provides appropriate contacts and advice should noise and nuisance problems arise. Territory Housing makes use of legal instruments to prevent antisocial behaviour wherever possible. No 'grog' and trespass signs are posted at public housing unit complexes and private homes wherever the tenant or tenant community agrees. Territory Housing undertakes significant capital works each year. Capital works is considered as a part of the normal budgetary process, and for 2005-06 the total approved program is \$28m.

Through the Home Territory 2010 strategy, this department continues to provide access to affordable, safe and secure housing for all Territorians. A program to progressively provide security screening to all Territory Housing unit and flat complexes is now complete, and smoke detectors should be retrofitted to all older dwellings by the end of this year.

TIO handles the management and administration of the HomeNorth loan portfolio on behalf of Territory Housing. Following re-tendering, a new five-year mortgage management agreement was negotiated with TIO in October 2002. Since the inception of the new HomeNorth loan products on 1 July 2004, there has been extensive interest and many milestones have been made. A summary of achievements by regions includes: in Alice Springs, the 100th loan was approved in May 2005, \$20m approved June 2005; northern suburbs, the 100th loan was approved in June 2005, \$17.5m approved June 2005; Palmerston, the 100th loan was approved in February 2005, \$25m approved April 2005; rural area, \$2m approved March 2005; Katherine, the 20th loan approved January 2005, and \$3m approved February 2005; and Tennant Creek, \$500 000 approved March 2005. I am pleased to report that Territory Housing continues to improve its efficiency and effectiveness to improve its operating results.

This department is committed to being financially responsible and accountable. This commitment has delivered the department with an award for the Best Annual Report since its establishment three years running and, for 2004-05, also took out the Best Performance Reporting Award. This is a significant achievement and reflects that the department is continuing to improve its internal governance and control arrangements.

The department covers an extremely wide range of responsibilities. Relevant officers from across the agency are here to assist and answer any of the committee's questions. When necessary, I will take questions on notice to ensure the committee receives accurate information. I apologise for the length of the introductory comments, but it is a very large and diverse department and, hopefully, those comments will assist the committee, and I look forward to the questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the statement?

Dr LIM: Minister, in your wide-ranging statement, you failed to mention that the budget for last year's governance in sustainable communities, budget line only, and the budget was only about \$55.6m and, in fact, your actual spend blew out by nearly \$5m. Then, this year, you decided to cut back again by almost another \$5m, so really you are, effectively, going to be something like \$10m behind. Are you looking at CPI in that, that you have not considered? You have a 2% efficiency dividend that you have not considered. How is the department going to manage its responsibilities based on the decreases in funding you have provided?

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, member for Greatorex. I will hand over to the CEO for a detailed answer to your question. If you go to Budget Paper No 3, page 192, it is accounted for. The apparent reduction in funding was primarily due to one-off establishment grants totalling \$3m for regional authorities, and a one-off additional allocation of \$0.45m for operational subsidy funding in 2004-05. As I said in my opening comments, the overall budget for this agency has grown from 2003-04 of \$204m to \$231m in 2005-06. I refute the allegation that there has been a \$10m cut in funding to this output group. However, I will hand over to Mr Dillon, the chief executive, for more detail.

Mr DILLON: To reinforce the minister's comments, in the governance division there has been, during the course of the year, the creation of two divisions, and some of these financial adjustments also have been switched across divisions. The main issue in variations are as the minister has outlined.

Dr LIM: As you can see, minister, if I refer you to page 191 of the same budget book, if you look at last year's budget papers, it was \$55.6m provided in the budget, the department ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I might stop you there. We are actually going to the true estimates, not the budget. I want to proceed now with the consideration of the estimates formally within the process ...

Dr LIM: Madam Deputy Chair, this is in relation to the minister's opening statement. I am not talking about anything else specific except the global figures.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You will be able to ...

Dr LIM: No, no. You continue to gag ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am not gagging you. You will not even let ...

Dr LIM: Let me finish this line ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, I am the Chair, member for Greatorex. This is my ruling. I will explain it to you. I will proceed to ...

Dr LIM: Well, I dissent from your ruling.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have not given you a ruling yet.

Dr LIM: You just said it is your ruling. You said I cannot speak.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No. I am explaining the ruling to you, if you listen. I will proceed to open the scrutiny of the estimates, which are formal words which I have in front of me, then we will go to the output, then you can ask your questions. It is a procedural matter that I am going to follow now. You will be able to ask your questions.

Dr LIM: Hold on a minute. You asked whether I have any comments to make about the minister's statement. I am still ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Dr LIM: ... addressing the statement.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You were going to the estimates ...

Dr LIM: No, I am not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... so what I will do is formally open the scrutiny of the estimates. There are a set of words I have in front of me before we move to that, and then you can ask your questions.

Dr LIM: No, Madam Deputy Chair, you asked whether I had any comments to make about the statement. I am addressing the statement ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No. You are going ...

Dr LIM: ... not the estimates.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question you just made was to the estimates. I will proceed to open it formally.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Output 1.1 - Governance

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill (No 2) 2005-06 as they relate to the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Governance and Sustainable Communities, Output 1.1, Governance. Shadow minister; are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Madam Deputy Chair, I dissent from that ruling. I was addressing the statement. On dissent you need to ask the Speaker to determine ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Put your dissent in writing. The Secretary will provide the dissent for the ruling to the Speaker. Whilst that proceeds, this process can proceed. So business as usual, with the dissent being deliberated by the Speaker in the meantime. Shadow minister; do you have any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, while we are waiting for that dissent to be addressed by Madam Speaker, I will come back to that following her determination.

Going to Output 1.1, we will cut to the chase. The grants distributed under this output area exceeded last year's budget by more than \$4m. How many four-wheel drives is this? Is it only councils that are related to the minister which are able to get free four-wheel drives?

Mr HENDERSON: Point of clarification, member for Greatorex, are we still on governance and sustainable communities?

Dr LIM: We are on governance and sustainable communities, under line grants distributed \$46.22m estimate for 2004-05, and for this coming year, \$43.35m. I am asking the question: your grants distributed under this output area exceeded last year's budget as you can see if you compare last year's budget book with this year's budget book by almost \$4m. How many four-wheel drives is this? Is it only councils which are related to the minister that are able to get free four-wheel drives?

Mr HENDERSON: Member for Greatorex, if you are going to take this process seriously - as you should, as a responsible shadow minister - I would anticipate that you would ask some questions that have some validity. In terms of the differential between 2004-05 and 2005-06 and the initial allocation in 2003-04 and 2004-05, as I said before, the increase was one-off due to one-off establishment grants totalling \$3m for those three regional authorities, and a one-off additional allocation of \$0.45m for operational subsidy funding. That is the answer to your question. It has absolutely nothing to do with four-wheel drives. I urge you to take this process seriously as is your responsibility to do so.

Dr LIM: If you are trying to sell the fact that many councils have benefited in the last year of the increased funding, you might have a one-off there, but why are you claiming to reduce the amount of grants overall?

Mr HENDERSON: We are not claiming to reduce the amount of grants overall; and those three councils certainly did receive the additional \$3m in the 2004-05 financial year for one-off establishment grants. For the detail of how that program is actually managed, I will hand over to the chief executive.

Mr DILLON: The underlying grants program has not decreased; in fact, it has increased with the CPI adjustment. You are referring to the performance indicators on page 193 which in the indicator is grants distributed. The \$46.22m includes the \$3m of establishment grants, and that was a one-off. Once you remove that \$3m you fall back to \$43.22m. There are some other technical adjustments but, in essence, you can see that the grants program has maintained its level.

Dr LIM: I draw back to my argument that with the CPI increase of 2.5% to 3% and your efficiency dividend of 2%, you are looking at 5% reduction, are you not?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I refute that; the budget papers clearly show there has not been a 5% reduction.

Mr DILLON: The efficiency dividend does not apply to our grants programs; it applies to our operational and salary expenses. Any suggestion that the efficiency dividend has reduced the amount of our grants is incorrect.

Dr LIM: Minister, how often is each council subject to an independent audit?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to my chief executive.

Mr DILLON: I have some information here about this; but whether I can find it is a challenge. I do have it in my mind. Each year, every council is asked to submit a financial statement at the end of the year signed off by their auditors. There are quarterly performance statements that are made to the department throughout the year. The department receives those financial statements. Grants that we provide are acquitted and we actively follow up our acquittals. On top of that process, in the last few years we have instituted a cyclical program of compliance reviews. They include a whole section on compliance and then reviews on service delivery.

Since the beginning of 2004, there has been a total of around 60 compliance and service delivery reviews undertaken of community government councils throughout the Territory. We have a schedule of proposed compliance reviews. The priority order is determined by a risk assessment process that we undertake. There are 28 communities on that schedule. We actively monitor and oversight our compliance of community government councils.

Dr LIM: Minister, who does these compliance reviews?

Mr HENDERSON: Chief executive.

Mr DILLON: We have a compliance team, headed by an AO8 officer, which undertakes that work in our central office.

Dr LIM: These compliance reviews are done by duly qualified accountants who can look at audits and show that those audits are done correctly and appropriately?

Mr DILLON: As I said, each year every community must have its finances audited. I am not sure of the specific qualifications of all the members of our compliance team. I doubt that they are all qualified auditors, but certainly they do have accounting expertise. We are confident that we have the capacity to proactively and effectively oversight the financial management of the communities we make grants to.

Dr LIM: Are the audits done by duly qualified auditors or accountants, or are they just done in-house with the audits that are done at every council?

Mr DILLON: As I said, we do not have qualified auditors on our staff. We have the capacity, if a compliance review throws up a red light and is an indication of some problem, to then go to the next level and hire in a private sector accounting firm with perhaps greater forensic auditing skills.

Dr LIM: I did not make myself clear, minister. Initially, the council is subject to an independent audit, and then the department does the compliance review that would, obviously, be based on the information obtained from the auditors. My question is ...

Mr DILLON: Not necessarily. The compliance review is done from a *pro forma* where we independently go in and look at the books. We do not just look at the audit done by the council's auditors; we actually visit the council, go through their books and we have a *pro forma*, and we independently check ...

Dr LIM: And one of the things that you look at would be the audit, obviously?

Mr DILLON: Yes, recent audits.

Dr LIM: You would want the audits of your clients?

Mr DILLON: But we will have looked at those before we even visit the community. They would have been on our desk back in central office. When we go for the visit, we actually open their books and ...

Dr LIM: Those audits - not compliance - within the community councils, are they done by qualified auditors or ...

Mr DILLON: Yes.

Dr LIM: ... or just persons picked out of the community who just ...

Mr DILLON: I stand to be corrected, but my understanding is that the financial statements that communities are required to submit at the end of the financial year must be signed off by a qualified auditor.

Dr LIM: Are the audits and the compliance reviews publicly available?

Mr DILLON: We do not normally publish them. When we undertake a compliance review, we do provide a provisional or draft copy to the council concerned so that they have a chance to see what is being said about them and natural justice is complied with. My sense is that were they to be sought under FOI, there probably would not be strong grounds for refusing. Each case would have to be looked at on its merits and assessed in terms of implications for privacy, etcetera. That is the complicated answer to a simple question.

Dr LIM: No, it is not. I find it peculiar. If I were living in a community and I am one of the residents there and I pay whatever charges I need to pay to the community council, surely the audit of the community council operations is something that I should be able to have freely available to me. It is no different from me having complete access to the annual report and audited accounts for the Alice Springs Town Council or a Darwin ratepayer having the same access to the Darwin City Council's audited accounts.

Mr DILLON: Yes, I agree. There are two issues here that we need to distinguish. The financial statements are audited each year. They appear in the community government council's annual report. That is a public document and is available to all community members, and it is audited. What I was

referring to previously are the cyclical compliance reviews and service delivery reviews that the department undertakes. Those are not normally published to the world at large, but we do provide them in draft and in final to the relevant community.

Dr LIM: So, from all these compliance reviews, you would be able to ascertain which councils are not performing and which are. There must be a spreadsheet - or at least a record of some sort - where you get the ticks and the crosses?

Mr DILLON: In theory, yes. The only qualification I would make to your comment is that this is a moving feast. What may have been the case 18 months ago may not have been the case 12 months ago and so on. We do maintain, as I said, a process of ongoing risk assessment of all community government councils that are funded under the *Local Government Act*, and so, yes, at any one time, we could go to our files and we would have a reasonable sense as to the risk level, in terms of its financial accountability, of a particular council.

Dr LIM: I imagine that in your department, either on a computer or a piece of paper, would be a spreadsheet of three community councils. You will have several columns and there will be quarterly dates written on it, a tick and a cross where they comply and do not comply. By looking at that spreadsheet, you would be able to tell that this council is really starting to stick out like a sore thumb - let us look into it. I would assume you would have that sort of document?

Mr DILLON: I am not sure if we have that particular spreadsheet, but we certainly have that information in one form or another, yes.

Dr LIM: Is that publicly available?

Mr DILLON: Not normally, no.

Dr LIM: But we can get it through FOI?

Mr DILLON: I am not saying you can. I am saying that that would have to be assessed if it was FOI. If you would like a copy, I would be happy to see whether we could provide it. There may be privacy concerns or ...

Dr LIM: If you would consider that as a small task for yourself.

Mr HENDERSON: Member for Greatorex, as the shadow minister you would be entitled to, and I would urge you to seek, a briefing if you want more detail in regard to the operations and how the department goes about these compliance reviews. From a policy perspective, the aim here is to improve governance arrangements across the Northern Territory with community government councils. These are reviews and are not meant to be a stick to bash people around the ears with, but a real opportunity to improve governance arrangements, to highlight issues before they become critical, as opposed to arrangements that were in place under the previous government where there were no systemic rolling reviews and the only time government moved in was when councils had totally collapsed. From a policy perspective, this is not about identifying and beating people around the ears. It is about improving governance, sharing that information with community councils, and trying to lift the capacity within those councils to govern their own affairs.

Dr LIM: I could not agree with you more, minister, that this is what this is all about; to improve governance, improve capacity within communities to ensure that their councils are well run. I applaud that motive. It was my motive when I was minister for Local Government.

What system is in place then to ensure that recommendations from audits and compliance reviews are acted upon, and real changes and improvements are made so that community councils are accountable, and ensure that this is being achieved on a regular basis?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: As I say, we have this ongoing cyclical process where we maintain a monitoring of each community. Our community development officers on the ground in major centres each have major communities allocated. They would be following up the results of compliance reviews with community government councils as they occur.

The issue is that, quite often, it is not a simple matter. For example, it may well be that a key personnel change within a council might be the significant driver to substantially improve performance and accountability within the council. A lot of effort goes into ensuring that we get the best people we possibly can working for councils. We work closely with LGANT. They assist with remote recruitment. We also assist them and fund LGANT to conduct elected member training across the Northern Territory. Again, it is the capacity of the councils to ensure that their staff are doing the jobs that are allocated to them that is crucial here in improving the levels of governance that the minister referred to across the Northern Territory. Yes, we have a regulatory role. We do not have the responsibility to do it ourselves.

Dr LIM: Well, yes and no. I know the community clerks, or CEOs working for community councils, are the responsibility of the council. Yet, frequently, the department would demand – not request - of the CEOs in the community councils to report directly to the Office of Local Government. Sometimes I see that the distinction between the roles of the CEO of the community council and local government quite blurred. They do not know where they stand and who ultimately is their boss, and you have a conflict.

What does the department then do about community clerks or CEOs of community councils when you find that they are dysfunctional, they are not working properly, and they are not doing the right thing by the community councils?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: As I said, we work with the council to deal with the issues. If it appears that the council has employed somebody who is not up to scratch, we will be working with them on an ongoing basis. We are dealing with very remote communities, in a cross cultural environment, in situations where sometimes the relevant people are not there when we go out there, even if you have arranged a meeting. These things do not necessarily all happen like clockwork. But, yes, we are persistent and we work with a community where this is happening.

Ultimately, we can get to the point where we, as the regulator, can put quite strong pressure on a community and, in fact, issue a direction under the act, if the minister consents, to make a change to the staffing. However, that is really a last resort.

Dr LIM: How many local councils or community councils have been subject to formal investigations?

Mr DILLON: As I said, there are around 60 compliance reviews over the last 18 months. If you are asking me how many do we have concerns about that would involve some sort of deeper level of investigation. I do not have the number off the top of my head, but the only formal investigation that I can recall in the last few years was the one at Ngukurr.

Mr HENDERSON: Member for Greatorex, the idea of the role in compliance reviews is to try to head off the need for formal investigations and to identify where there are issues of governance, or capacity within local councils, and turn that around. It is a proactive stance that the agency is taking to governance as opposed to what was in place previously, which was only a totally reactive position.

Dr LIM: And Papunya is still not under investigation?

Mr DILLON: In terms of Papunya, we did do one of these compliance reviews. That has formed the basis of virtually all the publicity that has occurred since. There has been press comment about a so-called Deloitte's audit. Deloitte's were, in fact, the auditors that undertook the financial statements audit for the council. Basically, the concerns that were raised there mirrored the issues that we had identified some 18 months ago in our compliance review. My understanding is that we have been on the front foot from the start, and that there more concerns there. We had concerns, but we have been proactively addressing them.

I should say that we understand that the Australian government has initiated an investigation at Papunya. That is something we are not involved in. Of course, their funding in these communities is quite often much more substantial than ours.

Dr LIM: Are you saying that the Northern Territory government is not undertaking any formal investigation of Papunya, while you did - and I recall the minister providing a report on Ngukurr?

Mr DILLON: The reason I say we are not undertaking any formal investigation is because we identified the problems. What we have been doing, and continue to do, is addressing those problems proactively. It

is not as if we have taken our eyes off the ball and are wandering around the field wondering what to do. We are proactively progressing the issues that were identified and still exist there.

Dr LIM: I recall the former minister advising parliament about the formal investigation at Ngukurr. However, I have not heard since then what steps have been taken to rectify the situation at Ngukurr. Can you elaborate on what has happened since the investigation was initiated?

Mr DILLON: I am not sure if I can get this all in the correct order but, in essence, we did undertake a major investigation there because we had evidence of fraud, both in respect of our funding and the Commonwealth government funding - much more so in respect of the Commonwealth government's funding. As a result of that investigation, the minister acted and dismissed the council. We actually appointed, under the act, one of our officers as the council clerk for a set period. We passed the investigation report to the police and they were, in my view, unfortunately, unable to see a way to pursue a prosecution.

Dr LIM: All right. Minister, the former minister said that he expected some 50% in the reduction in the number of councils that will be subject to formal investigations. What sort of time frame are you talking about this and how achievable is that?

Mr HENDERSON: Member for Grotto, I do not know about the terminology you are using here of formal investigations as opposed to, as Mr Dillon has explained, the rolling compliance reviews that this agency undertakes - the 60-odd that it did last year and probably similar numbers going forward. The agency has a program of rolling compliance reviews that are aimed to improve governance and capacity on communities as opposed to formal investigations. I am not sure which area you are talking about; the compliance reviews or formal investigations of which, as Mr Dillon has said, there are very few.

Dr LIM: I believe, and I think you will agree, that many community councils are not functioning very well. Rather than use the word dysfunctional, they are not functioning very well. The only way that you are going to make sure that they function well is to be forever vigilant, to ensure that they perform and, if you find something wrong, you need to start investigating those periods early, not wait until they become so absolutely dysfunctional that you end up with, as you said, the Ngukurr fraud, which is well past getting fixed. It is too late to fix it. What are you doing to ensure that these councils have the capacity to perform properly and that your department is providing the appropriate oversight?

Mr HENDERSON: Unless I have cloth ears, Mike Dillon has explained our approach to this. To ensure that we very rarely get to the stage where we have to dismiss a council, we embark on this series of rolling compliance reviews. Draft copies of that are provided to the councils, issues are identified, and departmental officers work with those councils in resolving those issues in very difficult environments. Mr Dillon has already answered that question. Perhaps if previous governments had embarked on this type of approach we would not have had to face the issue that we did at Ngukurr. I do not know if Mr Dillon has any further information.

Mr DILLON: Apart from endorsing the minister's comments, the only extra point I would make is that there are two sides to this coin. Yes, we do have to maintain a vigilant compliance regulatory regime but, as well and perhaps more importantly in my view, we have to sustain and improve the quality of our support for governance in communities. To that effect we have a range of support measures. We have some targeted funding for capacity building in communities, and we have specifically focused some research on improved governance.

We have started to rethink the placement of our staff; until recently, they have all been in the major centres. We are increasingly thinking that it may be better in key communities to get some staff spending much more time in the communities. We have termed these staff 'development coordinators'. We have modelled it, interestingly, on the terrific work that one of our staff, Christine Hart, has done in Borroloola, not in a purely indigenous context, but just working with the community there to get things happening, such as a community newsletter and whatever. It has had terrific benefits. We saw those positives and thought perhaps we should start to do this in some of these other locations where there are real problems.

Under the bilateral agreement with the Australian government, recently signed by the Prime Minister and Chief Minister, there is a schedule that relates to regional authorities and governance. In particular flowing from that, we are expecting to get some increased support from the Australian government to actually assist us to place jointly funded development coordinators in communities to work on increased capacity building and governance.

So, yes, we know there are problems out there. Yes, we need to have a compliance and regulatory regime that is effective but, as well, we need to improve governance and actively work to improve the capacity of communities to manage their own affairs.

Dr LIM: I applaud those sentiments. They are very motherhood and should be the highest aspiration for the department and for all community councils. I do not have difficulty with that. What I find difficult is that while we have this high ideal, some actions do not support those ideals. Consider if you now have a watching brief on Papunya rather than actually doing your own investigations as well. You had a compliance report or review but you have not got any further than that, whereas another jurisdiction has decided to investigate. I am saying that you are talking the talk but you are not walking the walk. Do you know what I am saying? You have the ideals and that is your action. Surely, your action should be matching your ideals?

Mr DILLON: Well ...

Mr HENDERSON: Hang on! Sorry, Mr Dillon. I find it offensive that you use statements that my chief executive was talking about motherhood statements. If you are going to have a go, have a go at me, but do not have a go at public servants. This agency is trying to rectify years of neglect, working with community government councils to improve governance and capacity. We all know how difficult that is in very remote parts of the Northern Territory, in small population centres, with a history of carpetbaggers as council clerks. They are trying to turn around years of neglect on this issue.

When hard decisions have to be taken, as was the case at Ngukurr, when the department, through its compliance review and subsequent work, believed that there was fraud taking place, then that report was issued to the police.

Regarding Papunya, the chief executive has fully explained what has been occurring there. My understanding, as minister, is that the compliance review did not identify any evidence of fraud. There were certainly issues in terms of governance, and we have been working with that council trying to improve those governance arrangements. We welcome the Commonwealth assisting the Territory government wherever we can to improve governance. However, you would have to say that there would have been some level of political motivation in the lead-up to the last Territory election as to why the Commonwealth government targeted one particular community in isolation of many others, and who may well have soiled the Commonwealth government on in this task in a politically motivated manner.

I would be very careful, member for Greator, about allegations that the department and all of its officers are just working to motherhood aspirations and not doing the work on the ground because that is substantively not the case.

As a former minister in this area, you would know that when you were minister, as would previous ministers for Local Government, there was no systemic series of rolling compliance reviews in place, and the only time that the previous government ever did get involved was when arrangements had fallen over totally. So, please, if you are going to have go, have a go at me and do not accuse hardworking public servants of being engaged in motherhood statements when they are doing the work on the ground.

Dr LIM: I would assume that whenever the CEO responds to questions, it was on your behalf and any attacks I make are upon the minister and the government, and not the CEO. You take that any way you like. As you said, I have been a minister and I know what I endeavoured to do for community councils in the term that I had.

Minister, coming to the Ombudsman's report into the investigation of granting and acceptance of special purpose grants, are there any other instances as raised in the report of other inappropriate granting and acceptance of special purpose grants?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is no, but I will hand over to the chief executive.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, the answer is no.

Dr LIM: Thank you. In response to the answer none, there is another instance of a four-wheel drive being a special purpose grant. Was this the case?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to the chief executive.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, the answer is no. You mentioned another grant that you had some concerns about. I do not think you ever identified it in detail, but my understanding it was a smaller grant of around \$5000.

Dr LIM: Are there any other instances that the department ...

Mr DILLON: Sorry, I am just advised that that grant never happened.

Dr LIM: It never happened. It was a grant that you know I am talking about, but it never happened. So it was nearly going to happen and it never happened?

Mr DILLON: That is my advice.

Dr LIM: Okay. So it nearly got there but did not quite get there?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Next question.

Dr LIM: I am getting to the next question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr LIM: The Chair is supposed to keep order in this committee.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, I am. I am moving on ...

Dr LIM: Then do so.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am facilitating it. I am saying 'next question' as part of keeping order, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Are you concerned that your name will not be mentioned in *Hansard*?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I beg your pardon?

Dr LIM: I said, are you concerned that your name will not be mentioned in *Hansard*?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Not at all, member for Greatorex, not at all.

Dr LIM: Minister, are you or your department able to provide any detail that has been identified as unusual in terms of grants being used for any extraordinary purposes?

Mr HENDERSON: Can you be a bit more specific? It is very hard to answer such broad assertions. Be specific and I will give you an answer. That was a very broad assertion and I would urge you to be more specific.

Dr LIM: It is necessarily broad because, when you do compliance reports, obviously those reports or reviews are specifically designed to ring a bell. What I am asking is: have any bells been rung when you do compliance reviews and, if there have, what have you done about them?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, that is a very broad question. As Mr Dillon has explained, last year we conducted some 60 compliance reviews across the Northern Territory. Each one of those, I imagine, would have raised some issues in regards to governance arrangements on communities and, in each case, those issues were followed up. Therefore, quite appropriately, the compliance reviews do ring bells and those bells are responded to. However, it is very hard to get to any detail. If you have a specific issue, or a specific community regarding specific payments, then ask your questions and we will do the best we can to answer them.

Dr LIM: That leads me to the next question then. Following those compliance reviews, and issues were identified, or at least brought to somebody's notice, was the minister informed at all of those blips in the reviews?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, member for Greatorex, I urge you to listen to the answers that are provided to you ...

Dr LIM: I am listening ...

Mr HENDERSON: The chief executive has advised you that those compliance reviews are provided in a draft form and a final form to those community government councils, and officers work with those councils addressing the issues. For you to ask if they are brought to anybody's attention, you obviously have not been listening to the answers to the questions that you have asked. Of course, those issues are brought to the attention of community government councils, and they are given an opportunity to respond to them in natural justice and, as well, to proactively turn those issues around. Certainly, if those issues are serious enough, then they are brought to the minister's attention, but not every single compliance review would go to the minister.

Dr LIM: Okay, not every issue goes to the minister. So, the minister is kept in the dark until such time as it gets serious enough.

Mr HENDERSON: As minister, and with the long relationship I have had with the previous minister, we have full confidence in the chief executive and the department to go about its routine work of improving governance. Every single compliance review does not end up on the minister's desk. I take confidence in my chief executive that if issues are serious enough that they need to be brought to the minister's attention, then they will be. We are not kept in the dark. The department does its job, as it should do.

Dr LIM: Listening to the former minister's response in parliament about the infamous four-wheel drive, it appeared that the department did not give sufficient advice to the minister to make him aware that the funding of that four-wheel drive to be used to monitor sites was unusual. Am I not right?

Mr HENDERSON: That issue has been addressed, and protocols have been put in place within the department to ensure that it does not happen again. Mistakes are made. They are resolved and rectified, and procedures and protocols were amended as required.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that the department did advise the minister and gave him sufficient advice?

Mr HENDERSON: No, I did not say that. Do not put words into my mouth, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Well, then, answer my question.

Mr HENDERSON: I did not say that. I did not say that. Listen!

Dr LIM: Then respond to my question.

Mr HENDERSON: What is your question? Ask me.

Dr LIM: Did the department provide sufficient advice, or not? From listening to the former minister's response in parliament to that issue, it appeared that he did not get sufficient advice. Why? What happened?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer in a minute to the chief executive, but all of those issues have been widely canvassed in the Ombudsman's report, and I would urge you to read it for the detail. Over to the chief executive.

Mr DILLON: A close reading of the Ombudsman's report would indicate that, at the time, it was close to the end of the financial year. I believe the department did provide advice to the minister, but it was oral advice because this was done very close to the end of the financial year.

In retrospect, one would hope that that did not happen again. However, the minister did have advice, and the minister did take a decision. The Ombudsman's report indicates that he wrote on the grant approval 'for monitoring of sites'. This was within the functions of the community government council. The Ombudsman was not, in the end, able to say that the minister had done anything illegal. The matter was subsequently checked by the Auditor-General and the police and nothing has happened.

So, yes, the department could have done some of its administrative actions much better, and I would hope that we do not do that again. In other words, I would prefer to give written advice to a minister on a grant.

I might say that this happened three years ago, and a lot of water has gone under the bridge. The department has put a lot of work into its governance and into improving its capacity to service the government effectively.

Yes, the department made administrative mistakes. The minister, in my view, made no mistakes whatsoever.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that the department did make a mistake, and not the minister? You are accepting that you were at fault ...

Mr DILLON: The department, in my view, failed to do two things that, in retrospect, we should have: (1) we should have given written advice to the minister on the grant, and (2) we did not give clear enough advice to the council about the gifting of the vehicle and, in particular, that it would be a breach of the act.

From the very first piece of correspondence from the Ombudsman, we admitted to that, we came up-front and we said: 'Look, that was an oversight'. The departmental officer's concern, for whatever reason, did not click, that there was a provision in the act that required the minister's consent to gifting. In a sense, the responsibility for it to click was not there, as it was the council's. That is a mitigating factor. But, yes, in retrospect, I would hope that our officers understand the legislation we are operating under and provide correct and fulsome advice to councils.

Dr LIM: Through you, minister, I am amused that you thought three years is a long time ago and a lot of water has gone under the bridge. Your government, minister, continues to troll through years and years of history and keeps lumping the blame on anybody else but yourselves.

Did the department then report back to the Ombudsman within a month of the report to confirm that action has been taken to establish proper protocols with the minister regarding the sharing of information about needs-based funding under the *Local Government Act*?

Mr HENDERSON: Chief executive.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, we have had an ongoing series of correspondence with the Ombudsman throughout the process of this investigation; some of it, as you can see from reading the report, quite robust. At the end of the day when the final report was issued and, in fact, the Ombudsman jumped the gun because he issued it before we were going to come back with some further information - there may have been reasons for that, I do not know. However, for whatever reason, the final report was issued.

We then went into top gear in responding to the recommendations. We looked at every one on its merits and we have attempted to respond to each recommendation on its merits. Most of them have been addressed. We have correspondence from the Ombudsman noting the positive steps to give effect to the recommendations the department has undertaken. He is keen for us to just finalise some of the later detail. In effect, I am at a point where, within a couple of weeks, I will hope to wrap up our total response. I am confident that we will have responded positively to each and every of the recommendations.

Dr LIM: Through you, minister, you are saying that the department has now formally responded to the Ombudsman and now a full, proper implementation process is in place within the department in terms of special purposes grants?

Mr DILLON: Yes, the specific recommendation about a protocol between the minister and the department of the processes surrounding grants has been signed off. That is already done. As I say, all recommendations have been addressed apart from one, which is in the process of being addressed.

Dr LIM: Can you name the one that is being address but is not completed?

Mr DILLON: From memory, it is recommendation 12.

Dr LIM: I do not have the report in front of me so what is recommendation 12?

Mr DILLON: Recommendation 12 relates to the Ombudsman seeking advice from the department as to what further action would be taken in relation to the CEO of the particular council.

Dr LIM: Minister, your officer alluded to capacity building within the councils, especially after compliance reviews are done. Can you give me some descriptions of training programs to upskill staff and

those involved in the community to be aware of legislative and ATCO requirements, of their actions, their responsibilities, advice in carrying out their positions?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, some of this pre-dates the final submission of the Ombudsman's report. As I said, we have been putting a lot of effort over recent years into improving corporate governance within the department and also the skills of our staff. We have a number of initiatives, I suppose - I forget the terminology, I think it is called Building Stronger Managers - which is a series of half-day, one-day courses that we regularly put on, on a range of topics which are basically aimed at building the skills of our middle management and above. We have had an arrangement with the CDU for a certificate course in community development. We have a graduate intake and cadetship intakes – some cadetships are focused on indigenous staff. We have a range of broad initiatives. Following the Ombudsman's report, we have built into our Building Stronger Managers some of the specific requirements that relate to the *Local Government Act*, so we try to target some of the specific courses. That is probably a good start.

Dr LIM: All right. I will not go into my own philosophy about indigenous people and governance because I believe that these people do understand governance and they have been governing themselves for a long time – long before the *Magna Carta*.

Has the department obtained any legal advice as to the possibility of recovering the \$35 000 and, if they have, how successful have they been recovering the money?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: The answer is that we did not seek legal advice, but we have been in discussions with the community government council and they have agreed to refund the money over two financial years.

Dr LIM: That is now locked in place to recover the money?

Mr DILLON: Yes, that is my understanding.

Dr LIM: In regard to this issue, the correspondence you have had with the Ombudsman, that is to the Ombudsman's satisfaction that things are now in place?

Mr DILLON: That is right. As I said, there is correspondence from the Acting Ombudsman who expressed his pleasure with the progress.

Dr LIM: Okay. Minister, have you implemented, or did the former minister implement, any policy designed to provide new training programs for newly elected members? I think that is where capacity building needs to come from: newly elected members understanding their role in community government so that they are familiar with the workings, the operations, and familiar with the *Local Government Act*.

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: My understanding is that we fund LGANT under our capacity building program an amount – from memory, it is \$300 000 a year – to undertake capacity building and member training for community government council members.

Dr LIM: Are you satisfied that the council in question now understand their role in handling SPGs?

Mr DILLON: I suspect that they understand it a lot better than they did before.

Dr LIM: I hope so. And they have demonstrated their capacity to the department and to your officers?

Mr DILLON: Yes. Certainly, we have had very productive discussions with the chief executive of the council and we have been encouraging them to approach and have some detailed discussions with LGANT. I am not sure where that is up to. The last I heard, it had not yet happened, but we were actively encouraging that. We have been impressed with the way the chief executive of the council has gone about remedying the issues that have been identified by the Ombudsman.

Dr LIM: Let me come back to the funding of local government. According to the report, there is inadequate funding for councils to allow them to manage well financially; to recruit good staff. How do you

see your inadequate funding - through CPI, through [inaudible] – helping local government councils? They are not going to get as much as they previously had.

Mr HENDERSON: On advice, can you point to which report is saying that there is inadequate funding?

Dr LIM: The Ombudsman's report.

Mr DILLON: My advice is it does not say that. Can you point to ...

Dr LIM: I do not have the report in front of me, so I cannot draw the specific reference for you, minister.

I believe we have laboured on the lack of funding for your department. I have to take on trust that your department will be able to continue to be actively resourced to provide capacity building in community councils.

Mr HENDERSON: That is why we are pursuing the regional authorities agenda: to improve capacity and governance. The policy arrangements are there. Issues in relation to funding, like all areas of government, are always there. It would be good if there was more funding, but the regional authorities agenda is in place and the department will continue to work with those community government councils in pursuit of that agenda in a proactive way.

Dr LIM: Obviously, under the former minister, things went off track. I seek your assurance on that things stay on track.

Mr HENDERSON: It is in your view that things went off track. I deny that they ever were off track.

Dr LIM: What caused the debacle?

Mr HENDERSON: Which debacle?

Dr LIM: To go off track.

Mr HENDERSON: Which debacle are you talking about?

Dr LIM: We are talking about the four-wheel drive that was gifted away.

Mr HENDERSON: Can I say, in defence ...

Dr LIM: That is one of them; Papunya being another.

Mr HENDERSON: Can I say, in defence of the former minister, that you had a lot of fun with this, and I can understand politically why you sought to do that. However, the Ombudsman, the Auditor-General and the Police Commissioner have all found that the minister was not at fault. In terms of the reference by the previous Opposition Leader, who made a formal complaint to the police, the Police Commissioner came back and quite clearly stated that there had been no illegal action undertaken by the previous minister. I would assert that the opposition should apologise to the previous minister for the allegations that were made against him, which were found to be untrue, with no evidence provided to the police to support the allegations that were made. I would assert that the former minister deserves an apology.

Dr LIM: Let me now go back to your statement earlier when you spoke about amalgamation of community councils, and you mentioned three regional councils. Can you elaborate on that statement; tell me how the amalgamations are going and how happy are those councils coming together?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. The Regional Authority Agenda is, obviously, a complex policy development process. We have been in ongoing discussions with all the key stakeholders throughout the Territory, LGANT, community councils, administrative councils and others. There has been good progress. The key point to make about the progress we have achieved to date is that it basically requires substantial work in the lead-up of the consultations with councils to get to a point of voluntary amalgamation. When you get to that point, then what you have is a bigger local government council. It does not mean that there will not be problems there. It does not mean that all the other issues that affect the public sector do not necessarily apply. I believe our experience has been relatively positive.

Tiwi, which was the first council, has gone relatively well. I would have to say there are teething problems there that we are still working on. Thamarrurr has gone exceptionally well. Nyirranggung has again had teething problems; we have had to provide some staff assistance there. As a result, we are actively talking to the Katherine Town Council which is very keen to support that. They have been providing some assistance to Nyirranggung.

One of the things we have done in the last year is attempt to put the whole process on a bit more of a rigorous basis; identify the stage of development that different parts of the Northern Territory are at. Our sense is that there are a lot more councils coming forward. They are very keen to start discussions. Unfortunately, there is a lot of devil in the detail. These things do not just fall into place once a couple of people say they would like to start talking. Yes, we have put it on a more rigorous basis. We know where particular councils are at, and at what stage of development they are at. In a sense, we have started to put a bit more effort into providing the support structures that councils are going to need down the track. So we have started talking to the Katherine, Darwin and Palmerston City Councils, which have indicated an interest in helping the other community governments in the Northern Territory, and for that they ought to be applauded.

We have a long way to go. This is not going to just happen easily, or without problems, or without conflict between interest groups at the various points. Having said that, the previous minister has - and the minister in his opening comments - referred to a review of the *Local Government Act* that was announced by minister Ah Kit. We are hoping that that too will start to, in a sense, identify some of the key issues and provide some clarity in the ways forward. There are key structural problems, systemic problems, with local government in the Territory and it is important that we address them. The government's agenda is doing that. *Stronger Regions, Stronger Futures*, yes, it has an impact at the local level, but it is a systemic policy response to the structural problems that have beset local government for many years in the Territory.

Dr LIM: I want to take credit that I was the one who delivered Tiwi Regional Council. While your CEO says there are teething problems, every council across the Territory - just look at Alice Springs Town Council. After decades it still has teething problems. You are going to have that because that is the nature of the beast. You will continue to have teething problems as people evolve and as government evolves and as capacity building improves.

Where else are you exploring regional councils at the moment? Every one you mentioned so far are all Top End from Katherine north. I have not heard a single thing about Central Australia.

Mr HENDERSON: Chief executive.

Mr WOOD: I think we are dealing with the wrong ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The member for Nelson has a concern that you have moved on to Output 1.2. I have indicated to him I believe you are still on 1.1. I am reading the Output Group, Governance and Sustainable Communities: Building and Supporting a Strong Regional Service Delivery Framework governed by Legitimate and Effective Local Governing Bodies. That is why I am allowing it member for Nelson. Continue, member for Grotorex.

Mr DILLON: Yes, I am happy to try to provide some indication of where things are moving. The advanced discussions are occurring in respect of, I would say, four particular areas which are the next off the rank. Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island is one. West Central Arnhem Land, Gunbalanya, Warrawi and Minjilang, Demed outstations is a second. Top End Rural – Coomalie, Pine Creek, Nauiyu Nambiyu, Dundee Beach and the Douglas Daly is a third. Alywarra group in Central Australia is a fourth. We have had extensive discussions in the West Macs. To be honest, they have not progressed as quickly as we would have hoped. The four that I have mentioned are the ones that seem to be next off the rank. There is significant interest also being pursued in respect of Victoria River, the Barkly, the Gulf and North-east Arnhem. There is significant interest across the Territory.

Dr LIM: Alywarra - can you name the communities that are involved in that regional group?

Mr DILLON: Off the top of my head, they are to the east of Ti Tree.

Dr LIM: Part of the Utopia region?

Mr HERDEN: Peter Herden, Madam Deputy Chair. From Utopia and Ampilatwatja out to Alpururulam, including Murray Downs, Epenarra, and Canteen Creek.

Dr LIM: So that is about the only area south of Katherine, and the Daly?

Mr HERDEN: If I may, Dr Lim, some preliminary discussions are also occurring with the Anmatjere Council centred around Ti Tree. Within the last month or so, there has been a fair bit of interest come out of the Barkly which was kick-started by some interest from Elliott Community Government Council. However, the Tennant Creek Town Council is now showing a significant level of interest in a Barkly regional authority.

Dr LIM: Those last three you mentioned, I assume are still a little way off yet? You talk about the first four. All right, I will keep a watching brief on that to see how well you progress. Thank you. That is all the questions for now.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 1.1? Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, this is just a more global type of question about governance. I know you have been speaking about governance from a financial point of view, but governance from a democratic point of view has always been a concern with me in local government. Does the department see a role to make sure there is good governance from that aspect?

I will give you an idea of my concerns. For instance, there have been changes to the Tiwi Island Local Government Council. What happened there is that there were three councils, where there were councillors elected directly from the people. Under the new system, they elect management boards which then elect representatives or appoint representatives to a local government council. My concern, for instance, would be that people have lost their direct representation to their own council. Does the government have some concerns about what I call a downgrading of people's local governance's rights in the new processes of amalgamation of councils?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer the hypothetical to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Wood, I take on board your comment. One of the reasons why the government has announced a review is not just on the technical aspects of the act, but to actually have a good, hard look at what representational systems are best able to, in a sense, allow for effective governance in remote communities, which is the issue that you are raising.

These issues are all a trade-off in the sense that the smaller the group that you have, yes, you will get to that Athenian local town council-type public meeting level of representation. However, with it comes potential issues of conflict of interest, etcetera, which we saw with the Ombudsman's report where members of the council are also citizens and you get a confusion of roles. So yes, these are issues. I am not denying them.

Having said that, there is a trade-off between how effectively we can resource small councils. There is a limit to the funding that comes in financial assistance grants from the Australian government for local government and, to the extent that you have a multiplicity of small councils, you potentially end up in a situation where they have a salary for a clerk or CEO but they do not have any dollars to do anything else. It is like the *Yes, Minister* hospital: fully staffed with doctors and nurses but they cannot afford to have patients. Clearly, we have to somehow sort through that trade-off.

Mr WOOD: I agree with what you are saying to some extent. What you did at Tiwi Islands was replace three councils with three management boards. They still all get funding, but the people have lost their right to directly elect the person who will represent them on the council. That, to me, is a fundamental right in local government. Forget you are talking about Westminster systems or whatever traditional systems, we have this system where, basically, if you have the full council sitting there, I have voted for one of you and you will represent me for the delivery of essential services.

To some extent, we are losing that as part of the regional development. I suppose I am interested - and it is more to you, minister, because it is a more philosophical question; I do not think it is hypothetical, but it is an important question. If we set foundations that are faulty in the first place, they may never change and we will be stuck with them. Should the government really be putting more emphasis on some of these democratic issues that need to be looked at?

I will just give you one other example because I have worked on Aboriginal communities: the issue of secret ballot. Regardless of what type of voting system we have in these communities, the people are able to vote without any fear from relations or from whomever and, therefore, you take out some of the issues about nepotism. Will the government look at some of these issues as serious issues?

Mr HENDERSON: As Mr Dillon explained, there is going to be a review of the *Local Government Act*, and that will be a public review to which people can make submissions. If those are issues of genuine concern, they can be raised in the review process and they will be considered in the reform agenda of improving governance and the capacity of community government councils and regional authorities to improve service delivery to the regions. I would urge you to make a submission through the process and your views will be considered.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister, I will. I suppose I am asking the question – as the act says, local government is subservient to the Territory government. Therefore, the Territory government surely has a role as the overriding body to make sure that local government processes are fair, equitable and democratic. Do you see the government having a role to play in that process, not just for input from the community, which is important?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not want to pre-empt what the review might have for consideration. Let us have a review of the act. As I have said, what the government is trying to achieve through the move to regional authorities is to improve governance, accountability and service delivery to Territorians in the regions. That is what we are aiming to achieve. We are going to review the act in concert with that. Without pre-empting that review, it is hard to see where we will go from there, but what I am saying is that all issues are on the table to be considered.

Mr WOOD: I understand what you are saying, but do you see that there is a danger that economic rationalism – if you want to call it that – economic benefits can sometimes override people's rights? In other words, those fundamental rights we have can sometimes be swept under the carpet to some extent simply because we are looking for more efficiencies and economic gain, which is all great, but is it a good process that devalues what we have?

Mr HENDERSON: I disagree that what we are seeking to achieve is to devalue people's rights. What we are trying to do is improve outcomes and services for people who live in remote parts of the Territory. I deny that we are seeking to dilute people's rights. What we are trying to do proactively, as I have said before, is to improve governance, accountability and service delivery to people in the regions through this policy. What we need to do is look at the act to see how it supports that ambition and where it may impede that. It is not the agenda of the government to dilute people's rights.

Mr WOOD: All right. We could go on and on with that, but I won't. Minister, you spoke also about how your government has supported local councils. I know the previous minister also spoke about the dysfunctionality of councils, but isn't it a fact that over the last three or four years, it is your government that, in real terms, has reduced operational funding? It was only in this election that you have announced that you will be indexing operational funds. Before that, many communities, since 2001-02, had real reductions in operational funding. I will give you some examples:

- Ramingining in 2001-02 received \$254 248. In 2004-05, it received \$192 916 - a loss of 25% of its operational funding;
- Papunya received \$134 771 in 2001-02 and \$107 182 in 2004-05 - a loss of 20%; and
- Tiwi Island Local Government Council received \$1 146 282 in 2001-02 and received an increase of 23%.

Wouldn't you say that many local governments – in fact, 38 local governments – received negative funding over that period? Thirteen local governments received a positive. Two had no change. Would you say that the government has not supported local government through its operational funding? In fact, some councils have received rather large amounts, and that was to the detriment of many smaller councils. That is one of the reasons some of these councils have become dysfunctional.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Mr Wood. I will hand over to Mr Dillon for detail. Certainly, we did have those funding arrangements in place as part of the formula to encourage the move to the local councils. Towards the end of last year, Cabinet did have a review of that particular formula and recognised that it really was not supporting the agenda that we had set through *Stronger Regions*, and those smaller councils were being adversely impacted. That is why the decision was taken to maintain the funding as of last year for the 2005-06 financial year and, ongoing, index that funding to CPI. I suppose it was an attempt, in a formula base, to try to encourage the move to larger councils. That did not work and that is why we have revised that. For the history of individual communities and whatever, I will hand over to the chief executive, Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: I do not have the details of each community in my head. What is clear is that that formula, which actually predates the government, did reward those councils which were proactive in looking to amalgamations, or were larger, and it had some other factors as well. As a consequence, it was a set pool and so there were significant increases for some councils and significant reductions for others. It clearly got to a point where the changes each year, by operating the formula, as the minister said, were unrealistic for councils and we had to do something about it.

Last year, the government agreed to put an extra \$450 000 into the pool to ensure that nobody lost as a result; the gains went forward, but nobody lost. As he said, the CPI will now cover the situation. It is an issue that needs to be addressed, and the government will be addressing that in the coming year. For the coming year, no council will have reduced funding. Into the medium term, there needs to be a new formula, or a new system of allocating the operational funding. I have some views as to what that might be but I think I should hold those to myself.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the statement was made that no council would be forced into amalgamation, or it would be voluntary. From what has been said, is it not a subtle form of being forced into amalgamation by cutting the funds? For instance, Cox Peninsula, where I know people would have liked to amalgamate, from my reading here received \$143 000 in 2001-02 and then was hit back to \$106 000 in 2004-05. Did they know they were being cut back that much? \$36 000 for a very small community is a very severe drop. Did they know that the reason they were getting cut back was because someone had pushed their arm up their back and, more or less, hopefully, would get them to agree to amalgamation?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that councils were aware that that was the formula that was in place. Through their own financial management they should have been able to predict that that would be the outcome if they did not move to other arrangements. As I have said, towards the end of last year, Cabinet did review that formula in the light of the fact that we were not achieving what we hoped to achieve. It was a formula that was inherited. Also, in the recognition that for small councils in very isolated areas of the Northern Territory, it is going to be difficult for them to amalgamate in a practical sense. We have reviewed that formula, as Mr Dillon said. We have to find a new process and way forward so councils have the certainty for financial years going forward that their grants will be linked to CPI.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister. I must admit it looked like amalgamation via starvation really. That is what you were trying to do. I am glad that the government has changed, at least for this financial year, because it was really hurting those small councils.

Mr HENDERSON: Further advice I have, Mr Wood, is that councils that did raise more of their own revenue - so this was also part of the formula for councils to look at revenue raising opportunities - also did well where others which raised little were not rewarded. Like I say, we did have a very considered look at this towards the end of last year in regards to if the policy objectives were being achieved, recognised that they were not, and for some of the very small councils it was going to be very difficult. So, a line in the sand maintained funding, gave some confidence in the link to CPI going forward. We have to work through this; we want to encourage regional authorities. We do not want to force the regional authority agenda. It is good to hear from the agency that quite a number of those councils around the Territory are looking to come together and move towards that regional authority. However, in recognition, there are probably going to be some councils that are very small, remote and isolated where it is just not practical to do so and we need to support them.

Mr WOOD: Minister, one of the reasons I feel that councils have also been dysfunctional is because they have taken on a lot of roles a traditional council does not have to take on. Have you any idea how many councils are running bank agencies, post offices, dealing with the housing, looking after health, running ACPO vehicles, have Centrelink and run CDEP? How many of those councils actually get true funding in return; that is, real funding for those particular jobs that they are required to do outside their normal requirements of roads, reserves and rubbish?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon, but you would be aware in this budget, the 2005-06 Budget, in one of the other hats I wear as Police minister, we have recognised that the ACPO vehicles really should be funded by police and owned by police. There is a role and agenda and additional money in the budget - I think it is \$439 000 per year - to progressively purchase and run those vehicles and take that burden off the councils. Certainly, in that particular area, we responded in this budget. It had been a call from LGANT for many years and their persuasive arguments won the day. In regards to those other areas, I will defer to Mr Dillon:

Mr DILLON: I take the point you raised. The reality in remote communities is that there are not that many organisations that have the capacity to deliver services and so, quite often, the community government council will then pick up other functions. Quite often, they will seek funding from the Australian government or from other NT government agencies. There is no policy emanating from the NT government or this department that councils should take on more than is said under the *Local Government Act* and the scope of services there. The reality is that communities make these decisions themselves and then go out and seek the funding, whether through user pays or through government services. It is not a matter of cost shifting by government. It is just a matter of it being a complex situation out in the bush with not that many opportunities for economies of scales, so community government councils pick up these types of functions.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. Wasn't LGANT involved with some discussions with the Commonwealth over real funding for these agencies that local government had to take on? I know you say they voluntarily take it on but, in many cases, there is no option. If you do not have a bank agency, you have an awful long way to go to put your card in somewhere to get some money. They have to take them, but are they getting adequate funding? That is the real issue. We talk about dysfunctional councils and I feel sorry for some of these councils, because if they were only allowed to look after the issues that they are required to do they would probably be quite good. However, they take on so many other things that they should not have to take on. Is the government trying to help alleviate that situation by keeping discussions going with the Commonwealth or banks or whatever?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: The Territory government does not have a strong involvement in some of these financial-type issues: banking services or delivery of welfare through Centrelink in remote communities. We have a strong interest but we are not driving the policy there. It is coming out of the Australian government. We would certainly be talking to communities and looking to support them. Things like rural transaction centres and Centrelink offices in communities are actively being promoted by the Commonwealth and they have done some pilots across the Territory, I understand, particularly in Wadeye and Maningrida. My understanding, from the evidence coming from that, is that when these centres are put into remote communities they find that there is a lot more take-up of the entitlements than occurred previously when the services were being delivered out of major centres. Therefore, in a sense, communities are missing out by not having these services. But the point you make - and it is correct - is that you are adding a governance load to the community when you do put the services out there and, quite often, they do not have the range of skills and the numbers of staff who can staff every organisation. Again, it is one of those paradoxes or dilemmas.

Mr WOOD: I hope the government would look at trying to change that. As I said, the Territory government is the boss of local government. Whether I like that, I am not sure. However, I see that as the role that perhaps they can play because they have a better relationship with the Commonwealth than sometimes little community governments way out the back of nowhere.

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Wood, I would also assume LGANT would be taking on a fair bit of lobbying as well. I will take that on board and talk to the department about working with LGANT and maybe raising some of those issues at relevant ministerial forums.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister. Just on specific issues: how long before we see a democratically elected local government at Jabiru?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: I might call on Mr Stuchbery to come to the table. I should say - and I might take this opportunity - there has been an investigation there and I should correct my evidence earlier where I clearly recalled Ngukurr. I am now advised there were five investigations including one at Jabiru which, as I understand it, has not been finalised. Mr Stuchbery can give us the detail.

Mr WOOD: The same question, Bill. When will the Jabiru people have a democratically elected local government?

Mr STUCHBERY: The arrangement currently in place is that the Jabiru Town Development Authority will make that decision in the time that it considers appropriate. I have had no indication from them as to when that will be. I am continuing on as manager of Jabiru until they decide on a process to pursue.

Mr WOOD: Just a technical question. The local government council was stood down; is that correct?

Mr STUCHBERY: The technical words are that 'the Jabiru Council or councillors had their delegations removed by the JTDA'. So they are not suspended; they are still in operation but their delegations have been withdrawn.

Mr WOOD: Some of the problems of the Jabiru Council were related to problems with the CEO - some of the councillors seemed to have a problem with the CEO. Why was not the CEO stood down as well or set aside?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: Mr Wood, I am sure that will come out in the final report by the inspectors of local government. The inspectors made an initial decision on a request for urgent advice from the JTDA whether or not to take the steps that they did. The inspectors found that the administration should remain in place and the councillors be withdrawn by their delegations being withdrawn. It was the best outcome in the short term.

Mr WOOD: Through you, minister, would that normally occur with councils like Ngukurr? When Ngukurr was investigated was the council and the staff either dismissed or put on hold, you might say? Why would there be a difference with those councils and Jabiru council?

Mr STUCHBERY: The difference is that the Jabiru Town Council is a creation of the *Jabiru Town Development Act* and the authority for its function comes from the Jabiru Town Development Authority. The relationship is not the same as if it were a community government council under the *Local Government Act*

Mr WOOD: It may be something we can look at, minister, under the review of the *Local Government Act* because it is a bit of an anomaly sitting there.

Minister, a couple of other questions: can you tell us what the total amount of federal government money given through the NT Grants Commission to local government will be this year?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: My understanding is that the final figure has not been allocated or advised to the department yet. We are budgeting for around \$21.735m, but we have an intuitive feeling that it may be more.

Mr WOOD: How would that compare with last year?

Mr DILLON: It depends on the final figure, obviously.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but what was last year's figure? Do you have any idea?

Mr DILLON: The budgeted figure is the same as last year. That is my understanding.

Mr WOOD: Could you tell us if the formula which determines how much each council receives through the NT Grants Commission has changed? I am not saying in minor detail, but have there been major changes to the formula that would affect councils?

Mr DILLON: My understanding is that there are two processes here, Mr Wood. The first is that the amount the Territory gets is a *per capita* amount and that will increase if the Territory's population increases. That is why we have this sense that we are going to get more. Then, the federal legislation requires the NT to have a Grants Commission which has a formula. You are asking if that formula changed. I know that we have been doing a lot of work on it, but I do not think it has changed as yet. That is my understanding, but I stand to be corrected. I will ask Bill to comment.

Mr STUCHBERY: Yes, the formula has been under careful consideration by the Grants Commission for the past 12 months. They have been able to modify the formula for the first time to reflect actual expenditure in regional councils. That data is now flowing in through a Grants Commission-designed *pro forma* whereby the commission, at the end of the financial year, is able to see exactly what revenue and expenditure are occurring and make a much better determination on real need in distribution under the formula principle. As I understand it - and I am not a member of the Grants Commission - they are introducing the first part of that reform process in 2005-06.

Mr WOOD: The reason I raise that, of course, is that there has been a fair amount of publicity about an increase in rates in the Litchfield Shire - which is just one council; I am not sure how it affects other councils. The word that I have had is that Litchfield Shire will lose money simply because of what you are saying; it looks at the expenditure and revenue and they have claimed that Litchfield Shire is basically not raising its rates enough.

In the budget papers under Financial Assistance Grants to Local Government, it clearly states both the untied local roads grants and general purposes assistance grants are indexed for council population and inflation. There is no requirement for the state or local governments to match Australian government funding or to maintain effort. If that is what is stated there, are we saying that the NT Grants Commission is changing the formula that says you have to produce X amount of effort if you want to get money under the general purpose assistance grants?

Mr STUCHBERY: The simple answer is that the Grants Commission operates under a formula as directed, or the principles as directed, by the Australian government and the Australian Grants Commission, so any deviation from that would not be permitted, no.

Mr WOOD: The Chief Minister said on ABC around about the election time - or it may have been before the election when the issue of rates was raised, and I think she was answering a talkback question - basically, on the issue of Litchfield Shire Council not receiving the same amount of money as previously was that they had not been raising enough money through rates. This has never occurred before. I am asking why should a council - which is probably one of the leanest and meanest councils - which has to operate 3100 km² of land, has about 700 km of road, there are 17 000 people, and has three transfer stations, one landfill and seven reserves - it has to maintain all that - do that? It has deliberately tried to keep itself lean and mean with nine staff, three vehicles and only one office to maintain all that area. What appears to be happening is that this council will be penalised because some other councils are not doing really well.

What I was trying to say when I asked the minister about the functionality of the councils is that I believe there are other reasons these councils are struggling. Yet, it appears as though the Grants Commissioner is going to say: 'These councils are very poor, they need assistance. Let us reduce the funding from some of the municipalities'. One would be Litchfield Shire - which does raise rates, by the way. It raised it to \$480, which might sound cheap for someone in Wulagi; I understand that. However, do not forget it does not have a rubbish collection system. It also charges people rates to actually seal their roads. Most people would pay from \$1600 up to \$6000 to seal roads that were not sealed before.

Minister, do you see that it is unfair that, if the system is now going to say to the council, which I believe has done well, tried to do its best ...

Mr HENDERSON: You have a vested interest in saying that.

Mr WOOD: I may have, however, the philosophy was good. It has not created a bureaucracy as some other councils have; it stayed as I think local government should be. It will now be penalised by the Grants Commission.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that you are engaged in a hypothetical here in what the Territory Grants Commission may or may not do in the future. As Mr Stuchbery said, it has its mandate as a result of what is set by the Australian Grants Commission. I believe you are speculating and hypothesising. The fact is that, on advice, there has been no identification that any funding to Litchfield Council will be cut. They made that decision of raising rates for whatever their own agenda is in where they want to spend that additional revenue. We do not direct councils in what they should be doing with the rates that they levy; those are decisions that they make themselves. The council has made that decision this year and, I assume, it has advised local residents where the extra revenue will be going.

Mr WOOD: Well (inaudible) cost they are going to lose. The Northern Territory Grants Commission does not just pop out of the sky and say you have lost that money; they have been having talks with council, discussing the formula. Obviously, the council has been identified as one of those councils that is going to receive a severe cut. So, it is ...

Mr HENDERSON: Says who?

Mr WOOD: Well, the Grants Commission has been having discussions with the Litchfield Shire Council and other councils, discussing the formula and, from that reading of it, they will lose money. Maybe that

highlights an issue that council has. The Grants Commission does not announce grants until well after the budget has been set by council. Councils have to guess what amount of money they will receive from the Commonwealth.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that decisions have not been taken. If Litchfield Shire, for example, has a crystal ball and they are forecasting ahead of decisions that have been made, obviously the formula is being looked at. However, no decisions have been made. I assume that the increased rates that the council has decided to levy this year have been allocated to specific projects. No decisions have been made yet. They are obviously polishing up their crystal ball.

Mr WOOD: The project they had, which was to upgrade the shire offices, which has again been mooted in the press, is coming out of reserves, not related to rate increases. What it highlights is the difficulty local government has if it does not know what it is getting from the Grants Commission when it sets its rates. You say it has a crystal ball. That is exactly right, because the Northern Territory Grants Commission will not announce how much each council gets, yet their budget will be delivered before it announces its grant. It makes it very hard for council to operate. Whether that is something the department can look at and see whether it can make that Northern Territory Grants Commission decision much earlier so council can make a non-futuristic guess - but I do not think it is - for their budget. I do not know whether you can help with that.

Mr HENDERSON: I will take that onboard in discussions with Mr Dillon to see if there can be a better alignment. The NT Grants Commission is an independent statutory body. Whether there is capacity to get more alignment towards budget cycles, we will take onboard. I will defer to Mr Dillon. On advice, it is something we could look at in terms of the review of the *Local Government Act*.

Mr WOOD: One last question, Madam Deputy Chair: the issue of pastoral land being incorporated. I remember hearing an interview with Stuart Kenny, President of the Cattlemen's Association, who had some concerns about incorporation of pastoral land into local government. What is the policy at the present time from the government on that issue?

Mr HENDERSON: State the issue again, I was just getting advice. Sorry.

Mr WOOD: I heard the President of the Cattlemen's Association talking about their concerns about being part of local government, or within local government areas. This issue arises from the non-incorporation of quite a few of the roads in the Northern Territory. Has the government come up with a policy regarding pastoral land in local government areas? Or has it looked at another approach that could help incorporate some of those roads into a local government structure?

Mr HENDERSON: There is no policy change, at this point in time. I did not hear the interview with Stuart Kenny. Of course, we are concerned about the loss of funding given the Commonwealth's current funding to regional and remote roads. Any changes that might be envisaged in the future would only be done in full consultation with the Cattlemen's Association. There is no policy change and my advice, three weeks into the new government, is it is not an issue that we have discussed yet. Again, Mr Kenny might be getting his crystal ball out and hypothesising as well. I have not spoken to Stuart about it.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 1.1, Governance? There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Sustainable Communities

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Sustainable Communities. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, in your opening statement you spoke about water safety and the programs that have been implemented. Can you tell me about the costs of the implementation of the swimming pool fencing legislation? I see from Budget Paper No 3 at page 193 that you have about 300 pools that you will be auditing. Can you tell me how things are going and how the money is being spent?

Mr HENDERSON: For the detail I will defer. However, I hope that you would applaud the policy outcomes, Dr Lim. Since we have introduced that legislation, no child under the age of five years has drowned in a private swimming pool in the Territory. As I said in my opening comments, from a policy

objective, we have turned the Territory around from having the worst under-five drowning record in Australia, to having the best. Whatever money has been spent - and it will have been significant - is certainly worthwhile in achieving the policy outcome of reducing the number of children drowning in swimming pools across the Northern Territory.

I trust it would be a policy that would be endorsed, it would be welcomed by the opposition and the funding that has been allocated to that need has certainly achieved the outcome. Thankfully, no child has drowned since the policy was put in place. I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. Yes, over the past couple of years there has been a substantial effort put into implementing the legislation and the amended legislation.

The operational budget in 2004-05 was \$1.829m. The budget for next financial year is \$1.47m. That is a variation of \$358 000. In essence, this arises from the initial costs that were allocated by Cabinet for the implementation of the new framework.

In terms of some data, since 1 January 2003 we have received 8830 applications; we have inspected 8681 properties; we have issued 2462 compliance certificates. The trend interestingly has been for the majority of pool owners to opt to upgrade to modified Australian Standards not the Community Safety Standard that is available. We have issued a large number of grants. I can go into the detail there.

Regarding outstanding work, yes, there is an ongoing workload here and it is continuing. I am satisfied that we are, basically, addressing the need to implement the legislation. It was always intended that after going over the initial hump we would reduce the number of staff in the area and that is occurring. We will take things forward as we go.

Dr LIM: Minister, it is a bit difficult to absorb all those figures that your officer provided just now. I wonder if you would like to table that paper that you read from? It probably makes it a lot easier. Mostly my concern is that ...

Mr BONSON: The member for Greatorex was just wondering whether the minister would like to table that paper for *Hansard*?

Dr LIM: Is there a point of order here? You were not elected as Deputy Chairman of the Estimates Committee. I just wondered what happened here.

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, unfortunately, the Deputy Chair had to use the toilet facilities.

Dr LIM: So where is the Chairman?

Mr BONSON: The Chairman is not available at the moment, but if you would like to make a point of order particularly ...

Dr LIM: I wish the Secretary of the committee was here.

A member: It is all right. She is back now.

Dr LIM: Okay, that is fine.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I did seek advice before going to the toilet, member for Greatorex.

Mr Henderson: Four-and-a-half hours is a long time.

Dr LIM: Well the chairperson should call a break.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is a query over whether a document will be tabled. Member for Greatorex, you know the minister decides whether a document will be tabled. It is the minister's call.

Mr HENDERSON: I am happy to table this document that just gives accurate details to where we are currently at.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The document has been tabled. Thank you, minister.

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister. I recall that in the order of some \$25m was provided to fix up the debacle that was called swimming pool fencing legislation passed by your government last term. Without looking at that paper your officer read out from earlier, can you give me a bit more detailed description of how that money was spent?

Mr HENDERSON: Before I defer to Mr Dillon, if you are calling a debacle the fact that no child under five has drowned in a swimming pool ...

Dr LIM: Never did.

Mr HENDERSON: ... I take offence to that. It has been a resounding success. Being a parent of three children, I cannot put myself in the position that one of my children would drown and the grief that that tragedy would impact on the family. I do not believe that the policy has been a debacle. It has achieved the ends of eliminating children drowning in the Northern Territory. There were certainly issues in regards to the application of the legislation in its initial phases. It is not for me to question you, Dr Lim, but I would hope you would applaud the fact that the legislation, and the funding, and the programs we have in place, has achieved the aim of seeing a cessation of children drowning in the Northern Territory in backyard pools.

Dr LIM: In response to that, minister, I suggest to you that I applaud any initiative that prevented children from drowning. I, in fact, was the alderman, deputy mayor, who introduced the pool fencing by-laws in Alice Springs Town Council, the best in the Territory, until the debacle of this government's last legislation that caused Territorians untold amounts of angst in regards to swimming pool fencing. It cost Territorians over \$25m to fix it up. That is a debacle, not saving lives – that is a very good thing to do. But you did it in a very knee-jerk way. The Chief Minister thought she could politicise swimming pool fencing and got herself burnt - \$25m worth.

Mr HENDERSON: In responding, I do not know where this \$25m figure has come from because it has been nothing like that. If you are so proud of your record - and I do recall you being on the Alice Springs Town Council when the council introduced swimming pool fencing legislation - why did the previous government, in 27 years in the Territory, choose not to have the political or the intestinal fortitude to actually make the bold policy move to achieve zero drownings in the Territory? Despite calls from the community for many years, and the fact of the Territory having the worst child drowning rates in Australia, the previous government sat on its hands because it did not have the intestinal fortitude to make the decision.

I accept, as a member of the government, that the initial legislation had significant problems, but we responded to that. To come in here and state that, somehow, you are holier than thou inasmuch as the record of the Alice Springs Town Council, but you sat in a previous government as a member of parliament and refused to do anything certainly shows how sanctimonious your comments are. We have not spent \$25m in implementing this legislation. I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Dr LIM: The former Country Liberal Party, in fact, empowered all local government councils to provide their own by-laws on swimming pool fencing. That was our policy and that worked.

Mr HENDERSON: How can you say it worked when we had the worst child drowning rates in Australia year after year after year? How can you say your policy worked? It patently did not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any other questions, member for Greatorex, in this output group?

Dr LIM: I am waiting for the officer to respond. He was going to speak on behalf of the minister.

Mr HENDERSON: No, we have not spent \$25m and I will let Mr Dillon respond.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, could you repeat the question, please?

Dr LIM: The question was: how have you spent the money to fix the backflip that you had on the swimming pool fencing legislation that the Chief Minister introduced as a knee-jerk reaction for political expediency? Tell me how ...

Mr HENDERSON: No, I deny there was any knee-jerk reaction or political expediency. It was a policy response to a tragedy that was happening all too often across Darwin. If you believe that a policy response aimed at eliminating child drownings is a knee-jerk reaction, I take offence, Dr Lim. It was a policy response to prevent children drowning in backyard pools across the Top End. For the life of me, I do not see why you are seeking to politicise this issue.

You are certainly at liberty to ask questions about how much the policy is costing. However, I will not tolerate you attempting to imply motives to the Chief Minister that were nothing other than a government trying to take responsibility to eliminate the tragedy of child drownings in backyard pools across the Top End.

Dr LIM: The amount of anger, angst and confusion that your legislation produced is what you guys then had to spend money to fix up. I am asking how did you spend that money.

Mr HENDERSON: Okay. Mr Dillon can answer the question.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, we spent the money by undertaking over 8000 swimming pool inspections and achieving 5000 new compliant pools in the Territory. We had a grants program to assist people make that transition. That grants program has, since 1 January 2003, allocated or disbursed \$4 450 267 to Territorians to assist them to upgrade their pools to meet the requirements of the legislation.

Dr LIM: The legislation now allows home owners and home vendors to decide whether their pool complies or not. The government now takes no part of the role in that except at an advisory level. Am I right?

Mr DILLON: No, that is not quite correct, Dr Lim. The legislation does provide for a Community Safety Standard as well as the modified Australian Standard. As I mentioned earlier, in the information tabled you will see that there has been something like 362 Community Safety Standard acknowledgement notices issued. The number of people who are actually going down the Community Safety Standard route is quite small compared to Territorians who are deciding for themselves to pursue the modified Australian Standard. Most of the 5000 compliant pools are actually modified Australian Standard.

Dr LIM: Minister, you recall that some two years ago an inspector was found to be wanting in terms of his or her professional standard, and failed to inspect pool fences in the manner required. A number of swimming pool fences were found to be inadequate and had to be re-inspected. How many re-inspections were necessary to fix up that problem? How long did it take? What did it cost? Are you able to provide me with a breakdown of the detail?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: I do not have the actual details with me, but I can indicate that there were around 400 re-inspections undertaken as a result of the potentially faulty work undertaken by that inspector. We indicated to all pool owners that we would meet the costs of any upgrade as a result of the potential negligence of that person. We have been identifying the costs to the department that resulted from that potentially negligent work. We did undertake a detailed investigation. The matter has been passed to the police. We have issued to the individual concerned a Notice of Demand and we will be pursuing civil action to the best of our ability.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Minister, your legislation also allows commercial properties not to fence their swimming pool. Do you know how many commercial properties have chosen that path rather than to voluntarily fence their swimming pools?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, that is a question that no one will be able to answer because the legislation says a commercial property does not have to go down that route. We do not know how many commercial properties are out there that have pools. We do not have records, or there is no way of calculating that. The only point I would add, though, is that the owners of commercial properties are still liable under common law for negligence, and have a duty of care to people who use their commercial premises. Quite often, they also have insurance policies that require them to take certain pre-emptive or mitigating action to ensure that the duty of care that applies to the citizens and users of those premises apply.

The short answer is, no, we do not have that information. The longer answer is that there are systemic or structural issues at play that will work to mitigate the risks to the public from the legislation not covering that.

Dr LIM: Having heard those words, I support the policy of fencing swimming pools. However, it appears to me that this government believes that children only drown in domestic swimming pools and not in commercial swimming pools. Surely, if it is important enough for householders to fence their swimming

pools, this government would also require commercial properties to do the same, not leave it to their own volition and choice.

Mr HENDERSON: Dr Lim, the facts speak for themselves. Since this policy was introduced, no children under five have drowned in private swimming pools across the Northern Territory and, to my knowledge, in a pool operated by a commercial provider. Commercial operators, as Mr Dillon said, have to manage their own risk, their own insurance and liability. Most of those commercial operators do that in a very responsible way.

Dr LIM: No different than a private householder has to manage their own risk and public liability in their own backyard.

Mr HENDERSON: We can agree to disagree. We have the policy in place; no children have drowned. We are very pleased with that. If you take a different view, that is up to you.

Dr LIM: All right. Earlier I asked a question about what it cost to rectify the 400-plus pool fences that were inappropriately inspected. What was the actual cost to taxpayers to fix those fences up?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: We will have to take that question on notice. My understanding is it was around \$200 000 or \$300 000 that has been involved, where we add in the staff time involved in the re-inspections, plus the actual work that we have undertaken with pool owners.

Dr LIM: Would the minister take this question on notice?

Mr HENDERSON: Happy to take it on notice. However, as Mr Dillon has said, we are also taking civil action and the issue is being handled by the police as speak. We will be seeking to recover those costs.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could the shadow minister please restate the question?

Dr LIM: Following the issue of the inspector who failed to inspect pool fences in a manner required, a number of pool fences that had been approved had to be re-inspected. How many re-inspections were necessary? How long did this take? At what cost to the Territory taxpayers?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated he will take the question on notice. That becomes question No 5.14.

Mr DILLON: I make the point, Dr Lim, that the potential cost to Territorians is unknown - an unknowable – because, if we are successful at our litigation, we will get it back. It is a contingent liability; not a real liability at this point.

Dr LIM: Well, contingent liability it may be. I suggest to you that this person will now be a private citizen and not working for government. Would he have the capacity to pay and, if he does not, would government then have to then bear the cost anyway?

Mr HENDERSON: We are dealing in hypotheticals. We will get to that point once the police have determined their course of action and the outcome of the civil action is known. However, no Territorian will be out of pocket in terms of those people who may have had the faulty inspection.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 1.2?

Dr LIM: Yes, I still have questions, thank you. In relation to community swimming pools - a program funded by the federal government - can you detail the quantum of contribution of provisional funds by the federal government? How much has been provided to the Territory to build swimming pools in a community?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: The advice available, Dr Lim, is that the Commonwealth has put in to our scheme, pools in remote areas, \$2.5m. The Northern Territory government has put in \$2m. The guidelines for the scheme also require local communities to make a contribution.

Dr LIM: Has the program been organised to roll out these swimming pools?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Yes, Dr Lim, my understanding is that that money has been fully committed and is being rolled out.

Dr LIM: Is there a schedule of the program available? I understand that some eight or 10 communities were named as recipients of swimming pools. Do you have a list and a time line as to when the pools will be developed?

Mr DILLON: I do not have that in my hand, but I can get you a list. Mr Stuchbery has it.

Mr STUCHBERY: Approved pools are in Maningrida, Yuendumu, Milikapiti and Borroloola. The time line for roll out is still to be determined because they are currently determining their community of interest contribution towards the pools. I understand that Milikapiti and Maningrida are well down the track. Borroloola is struggling with coming up with its contribution to the process. The Yuendumu negotiations have not commenced.

Dr LIM: In light of the very positive policy of 'no school no pool' that dovetails into these swimming pools being built, will the government not encourage those communities that have been earmarked to have the pools – whether it be through financial grants to SPGs - to get a pool built quickly? It would be beneficial for the community, for the school kids and for the school.

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: Dr Lim, the pool rollovers is clearly in conjunction with the Australian government as well. It is a three-way deal between the Territory, the Australian government and the community. Ultimately, a shared responsibility agreement would be signed up to or, in the case of the Tiwi, probably a reasonable planning agreement would be signed up. It is a three-way split and we are trying to get commitment all around from all parties.

Dr LIM: I agree with that. I also appreciate the fact that the government recognises the value of funding these community swimming pools and, obviously, the positive outcomes are very significant. What I am disappointed to hear is that we are all sitting back saying we have committed the funds but we cannot proceed because the communities are not able to contribute. What I am saying is to try to bring about these positive benefits of the swimming pool, surely the Northern Territory government could be more proactive and encourage these communities through special purpose grants to allow them to contribute their share and get those pools built quickly, and then derive positive benefits from these pools for the communities.

Mr HENDERSON: To answer your question, Dr Lim, and hearing what Mr Stuchbery had to say, we are not sitting on our hands. We are working with those communities to get them up to speed in terms of making their contributions. We are not sitting on our hands and we are working with those communities. For further detail I will hand over to Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: I should make the point that it is not just about money; it is about community participation and sign-off to a partnership that the pool is going to be a community benefit and maintained for the ongoing future benefit of the community. That is what the three-way deal is all about: to encourage that community in participation, rather than just putting money into it and not worrying about the future operation of the pool.

Dr LIM: Minister, I do understand that. I do understand that it is important for communities to take some responsibility for this benefit. However, as you heard earlier from the member for Nelson, obviously the funding of community councils has been decreasing. Whether it has been through the Grants Commission or whatever, these councils and these communities are going to find it difficult to raise the level of funding required as their contribution. What I am saying to you is why is the government not doing more to support these communities to get those pools built to then derive positive benefits for the community, especially the children?

Mr HENDERSON: Dr Lim, I do not know if you heard the answer previously provided by Mr Stuchbery. The issue is not a solely financial issue. It is about the ongoing capacity of those communities to actually maintain those particular facilities. We are working with those communities to assist them to have the capacity to do that. We have a positive agenda; we have allocated \$2m. We are working with communities and I, as the minister, would like to see those pools built as quickly as possible. We do not want to set those communities up to fail. Again, putting words into people's mouths; it is not purely a financial issue, it is a capacity issue; it is a management capacity issue and for further information again, I defer to Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: Dr Lim, I do not think I have anything further to add other than we are actively working with the community to ensure that we are getting by, into the project. That might be through the association with the store, or a progress association, a mining company in the region, etcetera, wherever we can get the community by, and that is where we are putting our effort.

Dr LIM: I would have thought that maintaining a swimming pool is not particularly difficult. There are enough people with expertise within the community council. In fact, I understand that most community councils have at least the Essential Services Officer who could easily teach others to maintain a swimming pool. I am surprised that it is taking so much time to get this very positive initiative going.

Mr HENDERSON: We have answered your question. Hopefully, when we come back next year, these pools will be built.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 1.2?

Dr LIM: Yes. Regarding animal welfare, what is the department doing about the multitude of diseased dogs in particular in communities and in our urban areas?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, the department has responsibility for administering the *Animal Welfare Act*. We have a range of inspectors and other staff who are part-time and volunteer throughout the community. The number, from memory, is 70. These are vets and others who assist. We fund the RSPCA a considerable amount to work within the community to address issues such as the one you raised and, where necessary, we pursue individual cases of mistreatment or maltreatment of animals and take appropriate action under the legislation.

Dr LIM: Is there a program within the department to remove diseased dogs, in particular from the streets, camps, and communities? We know that many of our indigenous folk suffer from illness because of association with these dogs. Are we doing anything about that?

Mr DILLON: We see this as primarily a responsibility of local governments. That is the sort of thing that community councils would do in remote communities. I know through our IHANT programs, we have, over the past few years, undertaken research on improving environmental health in communities and encouraging communities to take appropriate action where necessary. If there is an issue with diseased animals within a community, then we will be encouraging them to deal with that in an appropriate way. As I said, we do not see it as our responsibility to go out to Kintore and do something about the mad camel that is wandering through the community.

Dr LIM: Whilst you are not directly responsible in that regard, what sort of capacity building are you providing for community councils so that they can deal with those diseased animals? More so than feral animals, I am talking about diseased animals that are the prime cause of many of the illnesses within indigenous people.

Mr DILLON: We are straying beyond animal welfare and into environmental health issues that, as I said, we do support through our indigenous housing program. I am sure my colleagues in the Health and Community Services department will also have programs to progress. I am not sure that there is anything in this program that I can say to assuage your concerns, but I am confident that the government is taking appropriate action emanating from the development areas that are responsible.

Dr LIM: Staying on the *Animal Welfare Act*, my next few questions relate to the ongoing defamation proceedings brought by Warren Anderson against the former minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, if you have a set of questions, do you mind if we break for five minutes now and then come back to your set of your questions?

Dr LIM: Sure, we could do that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I just note that the committee has been going for two-and-a-half hours without a break.

Dr LIM: So have we.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is why I am proposing a five minute respite. If we make it seven minutes, I will add seven minutes on the end for you, member for Greatorex. We will come back at 11.05 and finish the session at 1.07 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will take this opportunity of a short break in proceedings to read into *Hansard* a memorandum I have received from the Speaker in regard to a ruling in respect of the objection taken by the member of Greatorex, Dr Lim, to a ruling by the Acting Chair, Ms Lawrie - me. It reads:

I have read the transcript and viewed the tape of the proceedings and it appears that the Acting Chair was following the normal procedures of the Estimates Committee in accordance with the accepted practice and procedures over the past three years, and as outlined by the Chairman of the Estimates Committee in his opening address on the first day of the 2005 estimates hearings.

I know the member for Greatorex is not disadvantaged as he is able to ask questions at the end of proceedings in the non-output specific budget related questions should the member be unable to ask the questions during the output-by-output process.

I uphold the ruling of the Acting Chair.

It was signed Jane Aagaard, Speaker, of today's date. I table that ruling.

We are continuing on questions on Output 1.2, Sustainable Communities.

Dr LIM: I was going to ask some questions in relation to the former minister and Mr Warren Anderson, but I note there is only two hours left. I did not realise that. I might forgo this and move on.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any more questions for Output 1.2 then?

Mr WOOD: Just a couple of questions, minister. This is Sustainable Communities? Yes. It says under Sustainable Communities, talking about partnership meetings:

This new measure refers to Palmerston Economic Development Coordination Group meeting to improve information sharing and communication between the agency, the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, Palmerston City Council and other stakeholders.

If I then read the stakeholders satisfaction it says 60%. Is that an indication of failure of this Palmerston partnership agreement to achieve what it hoped to achieve? Could you give us a synopsis on how the partnership agreement is operating?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Wood, the Palmerston partnership process has been going quite well. We have had a series of meetings. There is a steering committee chaired by the Chief Minister and the Mayor jointly, and then a series of sub-groups which look at particular aspects of Palmerston City's development. Those meetings occur regularly. There has been a bit of a work plan worked up by each of the sub-groups. I forget the names, but some deal with social issues, some with land and development issues, commercial opportunities, etcetera. I believe that process is going quite well. However, of the performance indicator you are quoting from, that is just us being modest about our achievements.

Mr WOOD: Okay. I will keep an eye on those agreements, because one of the concerns sometimes is that you have these agreements but, if the department wants to do something, it still does it. I would just be interested to see whether they are actually working in practice.

Minister, on the issue of dog control, which is another favourite issue out in the rural area, could you give me details of a letter that the minister wrote to Litchfield Shire Council requesting that they introduce dog control by-laws?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Stuchbery will deal with this.

Mr STUCHBERY: Yes, I understand that the minister did write to Litchfield Shire Council after receiving numerous complaints about dangerous animals, particularly dogs, and was encouraging the Litchfield Shire Council to consider their obligations for animal control under the *Local Government Act*. I am not sure of their response.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you say whether the then minister actually told the council to introduce dog by-laws?

Mr HENDERSON: We are going to have to defer to Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: No, I do not think there was a direction in the letter. I believe the message was that he was strongly encouraging Litchfield Shire Council to take up animal control in the shire.

Mr WOOD: As it is, we know they are considering that, not because of the letter; they just happen to be coincidental. They are looking at the by-laws.

To the other issue that was raised by the member for Greatorex about swimming pools. I relate it again to the extra costs the councils have to bear. The swimming pool program is a great program, but pool maintenance is certainly an expensive item. The Litchfield Shire Council looked at it years ago when there was an offer for a pool. How are these communities, on top of some of these other matters like looking after a bank and the post office, etcetera, going to find the funds to maintain the pool?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Stuchbery. However, in a broader context we are working with those community government councils in terms of budgets and their capacity to do that. Regarding Litchfield Shire Council, in the life of the previous government there was commitment for \$1m in a capital grant for a pool for the Litchfield Shire. The council chose not to take up that opportunity. That was a decision of the council and the good folk of Litchfield Shire are poorer because of that decision of the council.

Mr WOOD: I should not have mentioned that, but anyway, I did. I will get an answer on the other part of the question.

Mr STUCHBERY: The arrangement with the community is that the two government components would finance the construction of the pool to the operational stage and, obviously, to the make safe stage. The community's participation is to provide infrastructure such as fencing, buildings, ablution block, shade and lighting. That is dependent on what the community can raise plus, obviously, the ongoing costs which is the key issue. The community component could be as low as probably \$100 000 up to say \$0.5m if that is the sort of money they want to put into the pool.

Mr WOOD: Right. Will it be local government's responsibility to maintain these new swimming pools?

Mr HENDERSON: The advice I have, Mr Wood, before deferring to Mr Stuchbery, is that a number of communities already maintain pools - Ngukurr, Santa Teresa and others. Some of the money they raise through kiosks, subsidies from stores - in the case of a community-based store making a profit - is returned to the community via assistance with maintenance of the pool. There are examples out there and, as I and Mr Stuchbery said, we will be working with these other communities to put those financial arrangements in place. I defer to Mr Stuchbery.

Mr STUCHBERY: The fact is that the community government council, by and large, is the body in the community area that has the capacity to manage the funding and ongoing costs of the pool, which is the logical body for it to be. It does not have to be, but in all the cases we have negotiated so far, it will be the

council. In terms of the cost-raising effort, as we know, there is an example at Ngukurr where there is a very successful kiosk within the confines of the pool boundary. That is an example of a community that is already raising its own ongoing running costs in the management and maintenance of the pool.

Mr WOOD: I applaud that, minister. It is good that people are trying to help themselves. However, I have a concern, again, that local governments which have had their funding cut in real terms, have to take on a lot of other responsibilities and then, you might say, get a gift horse. I am not knocking the idea of the pool which, to some extent, is a very nice thing to be offered. However, I hope the reality of maintenance costs is put clearly to those people who take them on and, by looking after a pool, they know they will have to cut essential services elsewhere. That is my concern and I hope the government will at least monitor that to ensure it does not occur.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that the reason for the tripartite arrangement and formal agreements between the Territory, the Commonwealth and the community affected is to ensure that we do not set these communities up to fail with a gift horse, and that the ongoing maintenance of the pool is sustainable into the future to the real benefit of the community. Part of Dr Lim's concerns about the length of time that this is taking goes, to a large part, to the fact that we do not want to set these communities up to fail, but to make sure that they do understand the costs associated with running the pool, that there is the capacity within the community to meet those costs, and that those structures are put in place.

Mr WOOD: Okay. It is something worth monitoring, at least.

Mr HENDERSON: Absolutely.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There being no further questions on Output 1.2, that concludes consideration of that output group.

OUTPUT GROUP 2 – HOUSING SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Housing Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 2, Housing Services, Output 2.1, Housing Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, what is the current stock of Territory Housing? Can you provide a breakdown of the size of the dwellings, how many bedrooms, how many people live there and how long the waiting time is depending on the size of the dwelling?

Mr HENDERSON: A point of clarification, Madam Deputy Chair. On these types of questions, should these come under Housing Business Services in the GBD output?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, I believe so.

Mr HENDERSON: That is my advice.

Dr LIM: That is your advice? All right. I will save those questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So you can ask under that output, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Okay, I will do that. I will go to the Community Harmony Strategy. Can you elaborate on what that policy does?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: On page 194 of the Budget Paper.

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to my chief executive for the structure of how the Community Harmony project is working. However, from memory, there is ongoing funding of \$1.79m in the budget this year to continue to fund it. For the details of how that is structured and which organisations receive funding for what services, I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Minister, I was going to just mention before we get into that area that in the division Trish Angus runs, there is Community Harmony and Housing Policy, and the department [inaudible] that payment to the GBD. That is the reason for the confusion on that matter.

In Community Harmony, we undertake a range of activities. I will ask Trish Angus in a second to go into the detail. We have an NT director who is responsible for overall program management of this strategy. We have a series of regional coordinators well established in each of the five major urban centres; they work collaboratively across government. We have project management committees in Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy. There is an IDC that is across government and is chaired by the Department of Chief Minister. It is a whole-of-government strategy that involves effort and expenditure by a range of agencies. Historically, it has grown in this department and we still have a strong involvement. I will ask Trish to add to my comments.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, the main objective of the Community Harmony Strategy is to work with other organisations - both government agencies and community groups - to address antisocial behaviour and the health and wellbeing of itinerants and homeless people. That is the key component of what our department has responsibility for. With a budget of \$1.9m, we do not have the sole responsibility, so that coordination point is the key component of it.

Dr LIM: In regard to the people you repatriate back home, how much of that is a revolving door? Are they the same people coming back?

Mr HENDERSON: Before Ms Angus answers that, we do not repatriate anybody home; people return to communities because they choose to do so. There is no sort of compulsory repatriation as such.

Ms ANGUS: The Return to Home Strategy is as Mr Henderson just said; it is not meant as a repatriation. It is meant to try to help people make connection back with their family and lead a productive and comfortable life at home. That also contributes towards helping with the antisocial behaviour in town. There have been some individuals who have been repeats but, in the main, it has not. It is very difficult for there not to be repeats because a number of these people come back to town for legitimate reasons, generally for health care services.

Dr LIM: Is all of the 100% cost recovered?

Ms ANGUS: That is the aspiration. The providers who manage that for us have been having some little difficulty with some others, but the objective is total cost recovery on it.

Dr LIM: What is the percentage achieved at this point?

Ms ANGUS: I do not have it in front of me but I know it is in the vicinity of over 80%. The first year we started, I know it was 100% cost recovery but, of course, when more people were accessing it the outcome from that was not as extensive.

Dr LIM: Would you agree that if you do not fully cost recover, then the repeat use of the system is going to increase because of that?

Ms ANGUS: Nobody gets to access the Return Home Strategy if they have not repaid a prior cost that they have had.

Dr LIM: I assume that this is probably still in the same category. On page 194 of Budget Paper No 3, your aspiration to provide public satisfaction remained at 50%. I am a little disappointed with that. I would have thought you would aspire to a better satisfaction rate with the public than just 50%.

Mr HENDERSON: Before handing over to officers, this is the first time that there has been a systemic whole-of-government approach to try to address these issues of itinerants, homelessness and antisocial behaviour holistically across the Northern Territory. We were starting from a zero base. As Mr Dillon said, the Chief Minister does chair an inter-departmental committee. Many other agencies are working towards, in a systemic way, trying to reduce the impact on the broader community of this antisocial behaviour across the Territory. I can say that, if we achieve a 50% reduction in antisocial behaviour, that would be a very significant achievement across the Northern Territory given the low base that we were coming from. I believe we have made some significant progress in the last four years. However, there is a lot of work still to do, and we are committed to doing that work. I do not believe that the target, as set there, is significant considering the very low base that we were working from.

Dr LIM: The minister has quoted the 50%. The 50% is not about reduction in antisocial behaviour. I wish you could achieve 50% reduction in this short space of 12 months. What this relates to is public satisfaction with the reduction in antisocial behaviour of only 50%.

Mr HENDERSON: Again, public satisfaction would mirror outcomes. We are not about snowing the public. We are about really working at a whole-of-government level with community partnerships to reduce the impact of antisocial behaviour across the Territory. I would have thought that public satisfaction would mirror the outcomes that government were achieving. If Ms Angus has further advice?

Ms ANGUS: Yes, I agree with you, Dr Lim, our aspirations are certainly higher than 50%. However, that is a realistic figure. It is also in recognition that it is a very hard area to measure. Public satisfaction on an issue such as this is difficult to gauge. We have talked to colleagues interstate to see what performance indicators they use to measure public satisfaction. It has been difficult to get a handle on it, but we have had some public forums within the various regional working groups with focus group discussion to see if we could gauge it that way. Another mechanism for measuring public perception is the media. It is very difficult, then, often to gauge whether the media is reporting a total public satisfaction or whether it is the loudest voice. That figure is more indicative of our honesty about how realistic it will be to measure it.

Dr LIM: I believe that my other questions will be on public housing, so we will leave it here.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other questions on this output?

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, when we are talking about antisocial behaviour, as you are aware, we have had many instances in Alice Springs over the last 18 months to two years, including mob violence where people have been denied access to their homes because streets were closed; drug dealing in public housing; some murders that have occurred; suicides; domestic violence; babies being held as human shields - all sorts of behaviour that is distressing to everyone concerned, particularly the people who are living in the vicinity.

Of numerous complaints, could you tell me how many complaints have actually been made to Territory Housing - whether they be by e-mail or phone? How many of those complaints have actually been dealt with? You say 50% is what you are aiming at for public satisfaction.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, a point of clarification. Are you talking in terms of Community Harmony Strategy or Public Housing?

Mrs BRAHAM: Public Housing generally.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is actually a different output section, member for Braitling. We have already discussed that.

Mrs BRAHAM: I must have missed that. I can come back to that later?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: What are we talking about ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are talking about - on page 194, you will see the description at the top of the page: Provision of Policy applies to implementation of the Community Harmony Strategy and the purchase of non-commercial housing services from Territory Housing.

Mrs BRAHAM: Oh, sorry, Madam Deputy Chair, I was jumping ahead.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You do not have any questions on this output group?

Mrs BRAHAM: On Public Harmony? I am not quite sure whether it is even operational in Alice Springs. Perhaps the minister could advise what is actually happening in Alice with regard to the Public Harmony program?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Ms Angus.

Ms ANGUS: The Community Harmony strategy in Alice Springs, Mrs Braham, is under the auspice of the Quality of Life program. The focus of the Community Harmony strategy has been around, working with other service providers and coordinating activity in respect to antisocial behaviour, for the issues that you have highlighted with the housing comment. The other strategy we have been working on through Community Harmony has been in respect to working with Lhere Artepe for an elders strategy. Infrastructure department have been working on a transport strategy with the service providers at

Tangentyere in respect to the community patrols program which is not funded by our program; it is funded through Health and Community Services program, Commonwealth funded.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does this include the Home Living Skills program?

Ms ANGUS: Yes, sorry, I did forget that one. Yes, the Home Living Skills program is a jointly funded initiative of the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory and Territory Housing. Work has commenced on getting a module put together for that, and that would be auspiced through Territory Housing and the Aboriginal Housing services, the ASAUHA program.

Mrs BRAHAM: This module has been in development for over 12 months now. When do you anticipate that it may be finished and completed and put into place?

Ms ANGUS: Yes, the report is with Territory Housing at the moment. Maybe at the next output, we could tip that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Part of the program also was to do with having a campaign to raise bush communities' awareness of the protocols to observe when they came into town - regional centres. Has that campaign been completed?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Ms Angus.

Ms ANGUS: In respect to remote areas, the Indigenous Housing Authority community housing program has raised that at the remote area end. Earlier this during March and April, a series of workshops were held with indigenous community housing organisations across the Territory. That was one of the issues raised there. I am not in a position to speak from the urban end. I suspect Territory Housing might add to that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you expect the program to be developed and implemented for that campaign?

Ms ANGUS: It is inherent and embedded into Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory's program, so it is an ongoing component of the housing management program from a remote area prospective.

Mrs BRAHAM: We look forward to it because it is an important component of your strategy to actually do the education component so that, perhaps, we can avoid any of these problems that we do have in town.

Mr HENDERSON: Can I just offer, Mrs Braham, that if you would like a detailed briefing on the aspects of that program, it certainly can be arranged.

Mrs BRAHAM: It is not so much the briefing on the aspects, minister; it is the waiting for this to be completed, because this was actually promised I think in the November 2004 by the previous minister, and we are still waiting for this to be implemented. It is a long time to get these achieved.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that it has been implemented.

Mrs BRAHAM: What? The campaign to raise awareness in bush communities?

Mr HENDERSON: Through IHANT programs as Ms Angus said. It is happening; it is ongoing. How about we get you ...

Mrs BRAHAM: In Central Australia?

Ms ANGUS: It is part of the community housing management program.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Perhaps I will take up that offer so I can see this program because, as yet, I am not aware of it. The other one that you implemented was also security patrols in Alice Springs to help address this area. Could you perhaps ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Braitling, I just want to clarify that you are not straying back to public housing. That you are staying with Harmony because we need to proceed otherwise.

Mrs BRAHAM: Perhaps the minister could advise me whether the patrols are part of the Community Harmony program. I thought they were part of things the minister had said.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that they are a public housing funded initiative.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, I will bring it up later.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you have further questions on the Community Harmony strategy?

Mrs BRAHAM: Staffing levels for the implementation. Has additional staffing been given to help implement these strategies? I am referring particularly to Central Australia.

Ms ANGUS: Can I clarify the question, please, Mrs Braham?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, you are talking about the Community Harmony strategy being implemented with all these different components. I am asking whether there has been additional staff in helping implement these strategies?

Ms ANGUS: No. There has been in place for at least the last two years a regional coordinator in each of the major centres; that is, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Darwin. There are no other Community Harmony staff members in regional centres. The key objective is to coordinate and work with existing service providers - be they government or community organisations - to implement the various initiatives. Much of what is delivered under the banner of Community Harmony strategy is already provided by the providers, such as some of Health and Community Services activities.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one more question: is ASAUHA included as one of the providers?

Ms ANGUS: ASAUHA is included as a provider of Aboriginal housing support services in Alice Springs and it is funded through a joint arrangement between IHANT and Territory Housing. Territory Housing manages that component of the program on behalf of the two entities.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There being no further questions on Output 2.1, that concludes that output.

Output 2.2 - Indigenous Housing Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now will consider Output 2.2, Indigenous Housing Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, are you able to detail the projects that indigenous housing, or IHANT, oversaw in 2004-05 and what is planned for 2005-06?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: The budget for IHANT is – I hesitate; I might be about to confuse you. The revenue for IHANT for 2004-05 is \$45.3m and \$41.6m in 2005-06, so a variation, a reduction of \$3.65m in the coming year. That is as a result of the one-off increase in funding from the Commonwealth under the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program of \$4.73m last year. We may get future one-offs; we do not know. That is the revenue.

In terms of expenditure, there is a different set of figures because there is basically a carry over in IHANT expenditures each year because, for example, some of this Commonwealth funding comes very late in the financial year, so it is not all spent within the year. If you like, I can find you those figures as well.

Dr LIM: If you have a set of figures that show all those ins and outs and you are prepared to table that, I will appreciate it. It is just that I note from page 194 of the budget paper that the grant that is being distributed to IHANT has come down significantly by some \$5m. We are complaining about inadequate housing in the bush and here we have an IHANT program that is reduced.

Mr DILLON: The reason for that is the one-off funding last year from the Commonwealth of \$4.73m - almost \$5m from the Commonwealth - was a one-off supplementation based on, I suppose, hard work done by the previous minister with his federal colleagues to try to put the Territory's case of the appropriate allocation of resources to indigenous housing in remote Australia. You might recall we issued a position paper which outlined the case for greater resourcing by the Australian government of this issue.

The previous minister was certainly out there pushing the issue. The variation, as I say, is as a result of the one-off.

Dr LIM: In fact, we had the Minister for Housing in Tasmania offering her share of the Commonwealth/state government funding. It was her Premier who overthrew her decision. You recall that with amusement, obviously. You did not tell me what projects are in line for this coming year.

Mr DILLON: The general funding under IHANT expenditure for 2004-05 we estimate to be \$45.3m, and for 2005-06 to be \$41.6m. That is the total general funding of IHANT for the coming year.

Dr LIM: Are there any specific programs targeted?

Mr DILLON: Sorry, I apologise. I have just given you the break-up of the revenue that we have received.

Mr HENDERSON: Just a point of clarification, Dr Lim. Are you looking for a construction program agenda? When you say which projects are being undertaken ...

Dr LIM: Which communities have so many homes going to be delivered at what time?

Mr DILLON: We do have it.

Dr LIM: I recall seeing those when I was the minister. I am sure you have.

Mr DILLON: We have a budget figure for 2004-05. The problem we are having is how to take into account the revote from the previous year. I have given you the revenue figures; I am having a bit of difficulty finding a piece of paper which tells me the projected expenditure for the coming year.

Dr LIM: Would you say that revote money is essentially a federal contribution?

Mr DILLON: No, that is the carry over within IHANT of the unspent allocation within the year.

Dr LIM: What was the revote you said?

Mr DILLON: Here we are. I apologise for this breakdown here. In 2004-05, we have a budget of \$9.7m for maintenance, \$41.4m for capital and \$5.5m for management, which we totalled to something like \$57m. That is this current financial year. It was expenditure. The budget for 2005-06, in terms of cash outflows, is for maintenance \$10.5m, capital \$32.3m, and management \$5.3m; so that is about \$48m.

Dr LIM: For those two years you have mentioned, what percentage of the revote is from the year prior?

Mr DILLON: You can see, when I told you the revenue figures earlier of ...

Dr LIM: I cannot have them all in my head, unfortunately. It would be easier to see it on paper.

Mr DILLON: Yes, well, I do not have it on one piece of paper.

Mr HENDERSON: To make things a bit easier, if you are after the revote number from 2004-05 into 2005-06, then we can take that on notice and get it back to you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to do that as a question on notice, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Deputy Chair. It would be good if the minister could provide a spreadsheet detailing what was spent for 2004-05, and what is intended to be spent for 2005-06, with the outline of the program, including the percentage of revote for each year from the prior year.

Mr DILLON: We will try to get you that figure. I make the point that the final expenditure figures for 2004-05 have not been finalised because of the technicalities about expenditure rules, but we would have a very close approximation.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is a question on notice. I will ask you to repeat the question for the purposes of *Hansard*.

Dr LIM: It is on record, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, you either follow the process or you do not get the question on notice.

Dr LIM: It is on record.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Repeat the question.

Dr LIM: I will repeat the words I said earlier, on *Hansard*.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, do you want a warning or are you going to repeat the question?

Dr LIM: You do what you like. I have just told you. It is a complex question and ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is why ...

Dr LIM: ... it is in *Hansard* and I am sure those words can be drawn out of *Hansard* without any trouble.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, repeat the question.

Dr LIM: I think you are being really silly.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, I am asking you to repeat the question. I do this every time we put a question on notice - this has happened all week. I ask you to repeat the question.

Dr LIM: Moving on. What is the role of the ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, do you want it on notice or not, because it is currently not on notice, as a point of clarification.

Dr LIM: I suggest that the secretary can bring those words out from *Hansard*.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: This is not a question on notice until you repeat the question and the minister accepts it.

Dr LIM: This is just getting beyond a joke.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is not on notice.

Question on Notice

Dr LIM: Minister, I ask the question: will you please provide figures for IHANT, what was spent in 2004-05, and what is proposed to be spent in 2005-06, with the amount of revote from each year prior? Also the details of which communities are receiving how many IHANT homes?

Mr HENDERSON: If that is the question, I am prepared to take it on notice.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That becomes question No 5.15.

Dr LIM: What is the role of the Director of Indigenous Housing, and what criteria would one need to fill that position?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, that is an executive level position within the department. I do not have a copy of the duty statement or the relevant criteria with me. However, it would be equivalent to the normal senior executive-type requirements for all other positions in this ...

Dr LIM: Are you able to tell me which EO level it is at?

Mr DILLON: Sorry, it is an EO1.

Dr LIM: When it comes to levels such as an EO1 appointment, is there a normal protocol involved. What efforts are made to advertise the position and make sure every effort is made to get the best person possible for the job? How extensive is the advertising for this?

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, all appointments to the NT Public Service are made on merit. All vacancies are normally advertised for substantive filling. As it turns out, that position is currently substantively vacant, and there has been a process under way to fill the position.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that, normally, I would see departmental advertisements going out for all sorts of jobs from base level AOs to high positions. I would assume, given the size of the budget and the responsibilities of the Director of IHANT, that position would have been initially advertised. I understand it was not.

Mr DILLON: You may be referring to a temporary vacancy that was filled some time ago. I can confirm that the position was advertised internally - that is, inside the NT Public Service - for temporary filling. There was a process undertaken. From memory, I think we only had two applicants for that and a decision was taken to appoint a particular individual on a temporary basis.

Dr LIM: There were two applicants for that job which went to the former minister's nephew? Is that right?

Mr DILLON: My apologies, Dr Lim, I missed that question.

Dr LIM: You said there were two applicants for the job which went to the nephew of the former minister?

Mr HENDERSON: How is this relevant?

Dr LIM: He was saying there were two applicants. That is the one you are talking about, is it not?

Mr HENDERSON: No. If you are making an allegation, make the allegation. Any appointments which were made were certainly made under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, so what is the allegation?

Dr LIM: Your officer said there were two applicants who responded to the job that was vacant; it was a casual vacancy, or words to that effect. I did not know if there was any advertising done for that ...

Mr HENDERSON: You have just been advised that it was advertised internally. You were just advised that.

Dr LIM: An internal what? A secretive approach to it, or what?

Mr HENDERSON: It was advertised internally as a temporary vacancy.

Dr LIM: Two applicants applied for that job, and the successful applicant was the nephew of the former minister.

Mr HENDERSON: So what?

Dr LIM: Given the comments from your executive officer this morning that your department worked hard to make sure it gets the best possible people as its leaders, and the significance of IHANT, why was it done on that basis rather than on open advertisement for such a senior position?

Mr HENDERSON: I will get my chief executive to reply in a moment. This was a temporary position; it was not a permanent vacancy. It was advertised internally and an appointment was made on merit. If you are making any allegation that, somehow, the appointment was not made on merit, then I ask you to put your evidence forward, otherwise you are just trawling in the gutter. If you have an allegation to make, make it.

Dr LIM: I am asking and checking on the process that was used. Your executive officer advised also that the position has now been advertised. Has the current incumbent been invited to reapply?

Mr HENDERSON: Those would be privacy issues. If people want to apply for a permanent vacancy, that is up to them. Every citizen has a right to apply for any position that is vacant. What is the allegation?

Dr LIM: I just thought I would read an advertisement here. It appears to me then that in the advertisement it says that this position is subject to filling of another vacancy. Does that mean that the previous Director of Indigenous Housing, Mr Scarvelis, is not returning to the indigenous housing position?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not see how the filling of individual vacancies under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act* within government, and who holds what position, has any relevance to this committee and the debate on the 2005 budget. Appointments are made on merit and which public servants are in which positions is the responsibility of the chief executive officer under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*. It has absolutely nothing to do with the 2005-06 budget.

Dr LIM: But it does, minister. In fact ...

Mr HENDERSON: No, it does not.

Dr LIM: This is a position that was filled only weeks ago - only weeks ago. It is supposed to be a six-month position and it was only filled weeks ago. On 14 May 2005, you re-advertised for the job on a more permanent basis, within weeks of the appointment of the person into that job. Given the significance of IHANT and the officer in charge of it, why was this not done in the first place? Why did you advertise it internally, get two people, appoint one and then, within weeks of that, go to public advertisement? It does not make sense. Why did you not advertise right from the very beginning?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon to answer that. However, if there are any allegations that you are making, make the allegations, do not hide behind smear and smokescreen. Everything has been done appropriately under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*, unless you have evidence to the contrary. But, I will ...

Dr LIM: I am giving evidence that within weeks of an internal advertisement, an appointment of a person, you advertised publicly. Why did you not do that right from the very beginning?

A member: It does not look good.

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon:

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. I can shed some light on this process. I should make an introductory comment, and that is that I take my responsibilities as chief executive seriously and the legislation requires appointment on merit. It is a grave allegation, in a sense, against me and the way I do my job if it was sustained that I did not do that.

In terms of the temporary appointment, there was some internal adjustments inside the department. You mentioned Mr Scarvelis. He has been acting as the executive director in Local Government. That created a vacancy on a temporary basis of the Director of Indigenous Housing. That was the vacancy that was then advertised internally for temporary filling. An internal advertisement is normal, standard procedure under the public service arrangements. We had two applicants, as you indicated. You have mentioned a person, not by name, but by relationship. I will just make some brief comments about that because this is a decision I have to take responsibility for.

I was not unaware of the sensitivity of what confronted me. I had two names; I had advice from staff. There was not a formal interview process for a temporary filling - and that is standard as well, because the position is only filled for a short period - but I did have advice from staff and then I took a decision. The issue that confronted me was: am I to say I am not going to appoint the best person because there happens to be a relationship with my minister? I realised from day one that this was a sensitive issue. It is a judgment call; I took the decision. I should put on the record I had absolutely no discussion with the minister or anyone on his staff before I took the decision. I want that made very clear.

You mentioned the advertising for the substantive positions. We have recently advertised for three ED positions in the department at the ECO2 level and a number of EO1/ECO1 positions, including the Director of Indigenous Housing. There is something that is not absolutely standard in that situation, and that is that we did indicate in that advertisement that there could be what is termed in the Australian public service 'an expected vacancy'. I came from the Australian Public Service some three years back, and it is quite standard there - I do not know about here - that if there is the possibility of a consequential vacancy, then

you can advertise them all together. It is not that you are saying: 'This person is going to win the job'; it is that there is the potential for that.

The consequence of not doing this is that we would have had to go through the process for the first position, then, having taken that decision, readvertise and go through the second process. These processes take time – anything between two and four or five months in some cases. They can be fast-tracked. But it is my experience you are looking at around three months for a vacancy. Therefore, not to advertise the expected vacancy would have meant that we could not fill it for around six months, so that is the rationale for doing that. Again, there is no suggestion – we are not in the business of making promises to people - that any particular person is going to win any particular job. It is all done on the basis of merit.

Dr LIM: Not that I want to give you any gratuitous advice, but not only should you be doing the right thing, but you should be seen to be doing the right thing. This has a poor appearance. Did you know that he was related to the former minister?

Mr HENDERSON: Hang on!

Dr LIM: Did you know?

Mr HENDERSON: I will respond. You can have your view of the world, Dr Lim, but to imply any impropriety or breach of the chief executive's responsibility, you would have to produce some evidence.

Dr LIM: Well, I am asking the question.

Mr HENDERSON: Again, you do not listen. You ask the questions and you do not listen. Maybe you need to get your ears checked. Mr Dillon did state that he was aware of the relationship. I am surprised that you did not hear that. He has answered the question. You are down there in the gutter. If you have an allegation to make, make the allegation. Mr Dillon has given a full, frank and accurate account of what occurred, and if you have any evidence to the contrary, I challenge you to put it on the table. Let us move on.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on this output?

Dr LIM: Yes. How much has been spent on readvertising the position? What has been in publications nationally? Or has it just been in local newspapers?

Mr HENDERSON: Before Mr Dillon responds, these are standard advertisements that are taken out. I do not know what the relevance is to the 2005-06 Budget in terms of the provision of housing to indigenous people across the Northern Territory. However, this would be a standard process and standard costs incurred in advertising for positions.

Dr LIM: In response to the comment, the person who was put in the job was given the job on a recommendation that there was a development opportunity. I want to know now whether, in his time in the job, if you advertised only locally, you are going to restrict the number of applicants you will get for this job. Obviously, the person who is now the incumbent will have an advantage. I am not insinuating anything; I am just saying: 'Let us make it an open process that is seen by everyone as fair and equitable'.

Mr HENDERSON: The only person who is not seeing it as fair and equitable is yourself, your own ...

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! I will step in and say this is moving into the area of the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. I have given a great deal of latitude to the questioning so I am not yet again accused of gagging by the member for Greatorex, but I will point out that this is clearly OCPE. It is at the minister's discretion as to whether he wants to continue answering.

Mr HENDERSON: I can advise that the position was advertised in the *NT News*, the *Weekend Australian*, *The Courier-Mail* and the *National Indigenous Times* at a cost of around \$8000 for six positions.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions relevant to Indigenous Housing Services?

Dr LIM: Yes. The minister presented a position paper, which was mentioned by your CEO, when he went to the Housing Ministers Conference in December last year. Are you able to provide a copy of that position paper?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Yes, we can, I believe.

Dr LIM: Thank you. There was an agreement signed on 6 April between the Northern Territory and federal governments in respect of indigenous housing. Do you have the details of that agreement?

Mr DILLON: I have the details of the agreement in my head. I would be happy to share them with you if you wish.

Dr LIM: Do you have a copy of that agreement that you could table at a later time?

Mr DILLON: We would be happy to send you a copy of the schedule, if you would like that.

Dr LIM: Thank you. I understand that, in part of the agreement, the Northern Territory government agreed to take on all the responsibility of housing funding from 2006. Is that correct?

Mr DILLON: This is a schedule to a bilateral agreement between the Australian government and the Northern Territory government. It derives from work that was undertaken in COAG over the last few years. In particular, COAG identified an aspiration to reduce overlap, duplication, and to get more coordination in the delivery of indigenous programs. What we have done is in accordance with those broad principles that have been endorsed by COAG.

The agreement provides for the Australian government to transfer its funding for the housing-related aspects of the National Aboriginal Health Strategy, or NAHS as it is known, to the Northern Territory so that rather than having multiple programs coming down – let me digress for a second – if you were an indigenous person living in Nyirranggulong and you want extra housing, under the current arrangements you could apply to IHANT, you could apply to the Australian government for Fixing Houses for Better Health funding, or you could apply to them for NAHS funding, or you could apply to the Australian government for funding from the Army to come in. There is a multiplicity of funding sources that are out there. What the schedule does is attempt to bring those to one point, which will be IHANT, and to have a single mechanism for the delivery of housing programs in remote communities.

Dr LIM: I have a few questions to go but, noticing the time, I will defer them. Thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Under the IHANT program for 2005-06, has there been any allocation to providing additional housing in Alice Springs town camps?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Answer to Question

Mr HENDERSON: Whilst he is searching for the answer, I do have an answer to question on notice No 5.14 in regard to the re-inspection of pool fences. The department has inspected 401 properties out of 403. Two owners have not responded to letters sent by the Water Safety Branch. In regards to how long it has taken – 12 months. The length of time was taken mainly due to the difficulty in accessing these properties, as a large percentage have transferred and have new owners. In regards to costs, a letter of demand has been forwarded to the ex-pool inspector for the amount of \$390 000. This amount has been calculated based on an assessment of the costs to rectify negligent work, and includes man hours to re-inspect and rectification of any negligent work, and a letter of demand has gone to that person for that amount.

Mr DILLON: In regard to the question about town camps, Mrs Braham, one point of clarification. Is your question in relation to the last financial year or the ...

Mrs BRAHAM: It is for 2005-06.

Mr DILLON: I do not know the answer. My expectation is that the answer is no, that there is an allocation for the Alice Springs region, but not for town camps. That allocation is \$1.3m. I will give you an undertaking that if there is a proposal for housing into town camps, I will advise you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 2.2, Indigenous Housing Services?

Dr LIM: I do, as a local member. In Alice Springs, Her Worship the Mayor said to the media that she wanted to do away with all town camps in Alice Springs - start to phase them out. Is that the Labor Party policy at all? She said that as a candidate in the last election.

Mr HENDERSON: We are talking about the budget for 2005-06. There is not budget allocation in 2005-06 to that regard.

Dr LIM: Is it policy that impacts on your budget.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has answered the question, member for Greatorex, while you were talking. Do you want to see it or ...

Dr LIM: The question I have for the minister is: is it Labor Party policy to phase out town camps in Alice Springs? There was a policy that was uttered by the Labor candidate, Her Worship, the Mayor of Alice Springs.

Mr HENDERSON: The answer is no, and there is nothing in the budget that year to that effect.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. Any further questions on Output 2.2, Indigenous Housing Services? There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of this output group.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 - INDIGENOUS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Output 3.1 - Indigenous Essential Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Indigenous Infrastructure and Services, Output 3.1, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Madam Deputy Chair, I defer all questions that I have now for the next two Output Groups, 3 and 4.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one, Madam Deputy Chair. It may be a question for the minister for Power and Water. Currently, you are trucking water – which is an essential service - to Yuendumu and Mt Allen. What solution are you looking at to solve this problem? How much has it cost to date? How much has been budgeted this year to assist this community in having an essential service such as water?

Mr HENDERSON: I thank you, Mrs Braham, and defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mrs Braham, you are correct in that the Yuelamu dam has run out of usable water; it has been a very dry period. A non-potable bore has been connected to the water reticulation to provide water for hygienic purposes. That is a non-potable. The community is being supplied with packaged drinking water. In 2004-05, approximately \$0.5m was reallocated to implement short-term mitigation actions to improve the Yuelamu water supply. In late 2004, an engineering consultant was engaged to assess long-term service water supply options. We are currently in receipt of that consultant's report and it is under active consideration by the government.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, you will have some sort of solution to providing drinking water supply in the near future? Or do you see it in the fairly long term? I do not think we are going to have much more groundwater in Alice Springs for a while.

Mr HENDERSON: Mrs Braham, this has been an issue. It has been discussed in Cabinet over the last period, and we have asked for a detailed submission to come back. My advice is within the next three months, it should come to Cabinet and we should be able to make a decision about a way forward for this community.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 3.1, Indigenous Essential Services. There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 - Aboriginal Interpreter Services.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 3.2, Aboriginal Interpreter Services. Are there any questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one there. There has been a reduction, minister, of federal government allocation. As the demand for interpreter services seems to be growing all the time, how will you cover the new situation as to this moment, and what budget have you allocated for the Aboriginal Interpreter Services for 2005-06?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon for a response to that.

Mr DILLON: Mrs Braham, thanks for the question. In 2004-05, there was \$2.5m allocated. Next year, there is \$2.009m. The variation is \$491 000. The reason for that is a one-off funding package from the Australian government. I suspect they had some spare allocations and decided to pass them to us last year. We use that for training and, basically, to assist the improved capacity for our interpreters.

There has been no real change to the level of funding. In the most recent Australian government budget they have, for the second year in a row, identified that they are going to maintain their funding for another year. However, at the end of that year, we will face the same problem again; that is, the possibility that the Australian government funding will cease.

Mrs BRAHAM: You do not see that there will be any drop in the level of service for the current year?

Mr DILLON: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: No. Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of this output group.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - ARTS, MUSEUMS AND LIBRARY SERVICES **Output 4.1 - Library and Information Services**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Arts, Museums and Library Services, Output 4.1, Library and Information Services

There being no questions - we clearly have faith in our libraries - that concludes consideration of Output 4.1 as per the schedule. Outputs 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 relating to Arts and Museums have been addressed by the Chief Minister. That concludes consideration of this output group.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - SPORT AND RECREATION **Output 5.1 - Participation and Development Programs.**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will now consider questions relating to Output Group 5.0, Sport and Recreation, Output 5.1, Participation and Development Programs.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I congratulate you for standing in for the very memorable Mr Ah Kit. Two years ago at the passing of Slim Dusty, minister Ah Kit and I, in a bipartisan approach, sang a Slim Dusty song on the ABC. If the need arises would you fill in for minister Ah Kit?

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Mr Mills, you obviously have not heard me sing. I would be happy to join with you in a duet, but I do not know whether the community would want to hear it. I also remember the very memorable evening in the House - probably an Australian first - when in adjournment Jack paid tribute to Slim Dusty and sang a couple of songs. Mrs Braham, as Madam Speaker, you gave that approval as probably an Australian first.

Mrs BRAHAM: Probably an Australian last too!

Mr MILLS: So, minister, you have a big hat to fill.

Mr HENDERSON: That is right!

Mr MILLS: My first question, minister: during the election campaign, your Chief Minister and member for Fannie Bay promised \$4.8m for a new ten-court netball facility at the Marrara Sporting Complex. What is the parcel of land that has been identified for development? Please give a breakdown of the \$4.8m and how that costing is derived.

Mr HENDERSON: The commitment was made in the election - and a very good commitment, given the parlous states of the netball courts currently at Parap. It is no secret that the Chief Minister is a big supporter of netball. My advice is we are looking at land south of the BMX facility at Marrara. That was an election commitment. It will be met within the term of the government and all that detail has to be worked through.

Mr MILLS: In the interests of the public account, where will that money come from? Help me understand that.

Mr HENDERSON: It will come from the capital works program. I do not have the detail of the press release with me here but, of all of our election commitments that were made, at the bottom of each press release there was detail of which financial year that commitment was to be delivered in. I do not have that detail in front of me. All of those costings were sent to Treasury to ensure that they would fit within the forward estimates in the government's fiscal target. It will come from the capital works program in the financial year that was indicated on the press release announcing the initiative.

Mr MILLS: Right. So what financial year is this to be delivered?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is 2007-08.

Mr MILLS: Right. Can you inform us whether netball is contributing to the project?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is no. Obviously, in the design of the facility and what have you, we would work in conjunction with the community. It is a commitment for the 2007-08 capital works program.

Mr MILLS: 2007-08. What is the size of the parcel of land and what is the value of the land that has been identified?

Mr HENDERSON: The land is going to be out at Marrara so the size of the block and what have you has yet to be determined. However, it is a commitment to the netball community here in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: I accept that. In the midst of an election campaign, I would still, nonetheless, expect that these things have been properly thought through and properly costed and planned for.

Mr HENDERSON: Like the powerline! But I digress.

Mr MILLS: You certainly do, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has answered several times. Do you have a new angle?

Mr MILLS: All right. Is the land subject to native title?

Mr HENDERSON: Our preliminary advice is that native title is not an issue at Marrara. It is a commitment for 2007-08 that we will deliver on. It is an election commitment. Obviously, the department has not had any heads-up and DIPE has not been involved to date in scope, site and design, but it is a commitment that will be met.

Mr MILLS: You do appreciate – and I am sure that those who are listening do – that it is our obligation to ensure that things spoken during an election campaign, or at any time, are properly considered and are in, ultimately, the public's best interest in every respect, and not just the political imperative? That is the nature of these inquiries.

Mr HENDERSON: Absolutely. It has certainly been well received by the netball community. For example, the soccer stadium that is going up at Marrara has not encountered any native title issues.

Mr MILLS: I think there were initially.

Mr HENDERSON: But there are not now and the thing is being built.

Mr MILLS: You do not anticipate any issue with the netball?

Mr HENDERSON: That is my advice.

Mr MILLS: Even though you are unsure of exactly where the land is?

Mr HENDERSON: It is out at Marrara.

Mr MILLS: Well, yes, at Marrara.

Mr HENDERSON: However, exactly which particular block of land ...

Mr MILLS: I am sure there will be a sign up there very soon.

Mr HENDERSON: I am sure there will be. In fact, I will make sure there is.

Mr MILLS: Yes, mindful of the sort of leverage you place on that sign - anyway, we have been through that issue before. Please detail the feasibility studies that have been undertaken to serve this decision. What feasibility studies have been conducted into the needs of this investment?

Mr HENDERSON: The Chief Minister had substantial lobbying from the netball community. The current courts are in her electorate. Those courts are a council facility and are falling apart. The lighting goes off on a regular basis. Netball is a significant participant sport in the Top End; they do not have a home facility. I am sure the Chief Minister has made a commitment to the netball community after considerable lobbying from them.

Mr MILLS: That is very clear. In the interests of accountability and ensuring that decisions are made in the long-term best interests of the entire community, you have just indicated that there has been no feasibility study.

Mr HENDERSON: It is a commitment for 2007-08, in the same way, I think, that the CLP shadowed that commitment immediately it was made.

Mr MILLS: You are actually in the position now of giving an account to the Territory community ...

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, and this is for the 2005-06 Budget. You are talking about 2007-08.

Mr MILLS: I understand that, but a decision has been made. I assume that there has been some kind of feasibility study on how this decision will impact upon, for example, parking at Marrara. What other groups will be affected by this decision? Will there be joint share arrangements? Does it serve long-term objectives? Those sorts of considerations are the domain of an Estimates Committee.

Mr HENDERSON: I am trying to be accommodating here, but the election commitment was made for the 2007-08 financial year.

Mr MILLS: That is understood.

Mr HENDERSON: We are considering the 2005-06 Budget. It is an election commitment of the government to build that facility in 2007-08 at Marrara. In the intervening period, there will, of course, be a lot of work done on design, discussions with stakeholders, and we will deliver on that commitment. I will - or whoever is the minister here in consideration of the 2007-08 Budget - be able to give you all of that detail, but that is an election commitment. The policy work of the very specific issues about which you are talking has not been done yet.

Mr MILLS: Therefore, what we have is nothing more substantial than a media release.

Mr HENDERSON: We have notionally allocated money. They have been assessed against the forward estimates. My advice is that the CLP committed \$4m for eight courts; we are committing \$4.8m for 10. I do not understand, really, what you are trying to get to here, because we are considering ...

Mr MILLS: It is an issue of accountability. If the roles were reversed, and I was sitting there and you were sitting here, you would be asking very similar questions, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: I do not think so - probably in the lead-up to the 2007-08 budget. In the accountability of what the Labor Party took to the electorate, the costings that we allocated to all of our commitments were identified on each and every one of the commitments that were made. They went to Treasury to account for those costings against the forward estimates. Treasury came back and said that, yes, they could be afforded and still meet the fiscal targets of the government. I contrast that to the CLP commitments that were made during the election where there was \$218m-worth of savings that you said you could make within government, but could not say where you were going to make them - and there was a \$56m hole in the costings. For any discussion about accountability, that has been tested by Treasury officers. We came through with flying colours, and you sank without a trace.

Mr MILLS: Come on, fair is fair.

Mr HENDERSON: Well, it is true.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could we proceed with questions on the output group?

Mr MILLS: Certainly. Thank you for the little reminder.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is your time, and you will complain at the end. I try to facilitate it.

Mr MILLS: I shall not rise to the bait. I will not talk about the traffic flows and the issues which really do need to be attended to now. Soccer is already moving ahead with its development. We have another significant usage for that area already determined by press release. I have been past those netball courts when the competition is on and there are a lot of vehicles there. There are some really quite serious problems. I come from Palmerston where lots of these plans were not properly considered in the longer term, and you do have traffic problems. There are good reasons to talk about these things.

In terms of soccer, what leasing arrangements are in place for the new soccer facility?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that those issues are still under discussion with the Football Federation of the Northern Territory.

Mr MILLS: I have to remember it is football.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I have to remember it as well.

Mr MILLS: Is the Football Federation NT contributing anything to the construction of these facilities?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that, no, they are not. I am very pleased with the government's commitment to this particular facility. As a major participant in sport in the Northern Territory, as Zico Ilic has said on many occasions, soccer has been the poor cousin. They have been gypsies roaming around various facilities, and it is fabulous to be able to deliver for that particular community.

Mr MILLS: I wish to add then to that comment, that in no way should it be assumed by the questions that are being asked of government in terms of accountability that we are anything less than supportive of support to football.

Leading to a broader issue which affects the planning for the Marrara Sporting Complex, last year, in the last estimates, the minister said that government was considering a board of trustees to oversee the Marrara sports precinct. Has government abandoned its plan to establish a sporting trust to oversee the entire sporting complex?

Mr HENDERSON: At all times, we are looking to improve the governance and management of sporting facilities across the Northern Territory, but no final decisions have been taken in that regard. I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Mills, the matter is still under consideration by government.

Mr MILLS: It is still under consideration? Are the user groups actively involved in these considerations?

Mr DILLON: The short answer is, no, because the government is yet to, in a sense, develop its own position, or even the parameters around the position that could go out to consultation. Were the government to go down this path, I am sure there will be a consultation phase.

Mr MILLS: I am absolutely sure there will be consultation. However, 12 months ago, this was revealed through the estimates process and, 12 months later, the position of government is still being formulated. I am surprised, because the sporting groups are aware of these considerations but know very little about how it may impact upon them, and they are rightfully concerned about the shape and the management of sporting activities within that area.

Mr HENDERSON: I can certainly give a commitment on behalf of government that no decisions will be made. Any consideration of new policy, when it comes to Cabinet and we decide that we either will or will not move down this path; if decisions are made that we will look to do that, we will obviously engage with stakeholders. We, as a government, do consult with community and no decisions are made - and they certainly would not be made - prior to extensive consultation.

Mr MILLS: I can accept that. Minister, what is the cost to hire a corporate facility at an AFL match?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not know whether we would have that information.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It may come under Major Events. I will seek clarification.

Mr HENDERSON: The advice I have it is nil because, given the support that we provide the AFL in that contract we have with them, government does not pay for corporate facilities.

Mr MILLS: Any corporate facilities? How many, for example, would have been allocated at the recent AFL match?

Mr HENDERSON: One box to the government is my advice.

Mr MILLS: My understanding is that there were two corporate boxes at the recent AFL match. How does that work?

Mr HENDERSON: The advice is we are entitled to a super box but, because we did not go down that path, we took two smaller boxes - whatever the definition of a super box is. That is the advice that I have. I am intrigued as to the super box concept myself.

Mr MILLS: Notwithstanding all of this, how much does it cost to use one of these corporate boxes? In fact, it is not nil.

Mr HENDERSON: Let me defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Mills, there is a lease between the government and the AFLNT, so what they charge - in fact, Marrara Oval is under their control and they decide how much to charge for rental or leasing of boxes.

Mr MILLS: I accept that. But you are unaware of what the cost is?

Mr DILLON: It is not our responsibility to be aware.

Mr MILLS: All right. I will find out then. Minister, could you please detail your department's sponsorship and financial contribution to all major national and international fixtures that were held in the Territory in 2004-05? There was netball, AFL, NBL, Rugby, V8 Supercars and the like.

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer that to Mr Dillon.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For point of clarification, the V8s is under Major Events. You may have to get that information from the Department of the Chief Minister.

Mr MILLS: I accept that, but I recall some signage which reflected on this department at the V8 Supercars, so there may have been some level of sponsorship. I need to make that inquiry.

Mr DILLON: Mr Mills, I will start by saying I am not sure that I have all the information here. For the NT Sports Awards, the sponsorship was \$20 000 in cash and \$30 000 in kind; the Alice Springs Masters Games, \$89 000 in cash and \$540 000 in kind for 2004; and the Arafura Games for 2005, \$61 000 in cash and \$647 000 in kind.

I do not have information on the V8s because that is a matter that is managed by a Major Events company which, although I am a director, is in a different portfolio.

Mr MILLS: I accept that. There was no sponsorship then from Sport and Recreation at all for the V8s?

Mr DILLON: No.

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Mills, further advice from our good people down the back here - I assume that this cash? – netball, \$58 000; AFL, \$250 000; NBL, \$60 000; and Australian Rugby Union, \$35 000; totalling \$403 000.

Mr MILLS: That is it?

Mr HENDERSON: That is it. The nods are from the back; that is it.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Could you please detail your department's corporate sponsorship and financial contribution to all major national and international fixtures which will be held in the Territory in 2005-06?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: The answer is a difficult one to provide because, basically, we do not know the detail of what we will do. The general answer is that yes, the government will sponsor the major events over the coming year that are scheduled; the actual amounts are subject to specific decisions by the government.

Mr MILLS: Okay, I will go back one step further then. What major sporting events have recommitted to play fixtures in the Territory in 2005-06?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: We have six major events scheduled: on 23 January 2005, we had the Wildcats and the Sydney Kings; on 12 February, we had the Aboriginal All Stars match; on 26 February 2005, the Wizard Cup, Collingwood versus West Coast Eagles; 5 March 2005, AFL Wizard Cup in Alice Springs, Richmond and Fremantle; 11 June, the Commonwealth Bank Trophy Netball, the Canberra Darters versus the Firebirds from Queensland; and 18 June, the AFL Western Bulldogs versus Carlton. Sorry, I am not sure I answered the question. They have all occurred.

Mr MILLS: They have occurred. Is there anything to come? What can we look forward to for the remainder of this year in fixtures? They have all been done before the election by the sound of it.

Mr HENDERSON: The advice is AFL and NBL are confirmed for the next financial year. We do not have dates confirmed yet for the cricket but we are working on that with the Australian Cricket Board. We are in discussions with netball as well. Confirmed for the coming year is AFL and NBL.

Mr MILLS: Okay, thank you. Please, could you tell me the cricket story? What is the story with international cricket fixtures?

Mr HENDERSON: It is good. We are very proud, as a government, that we did bring test cricket to the Northern Territory to give Territorians, and particularly kids, the opportunity to see the Australian test team in action. I was very disappointed during the recent election campaign that the previous Opposition Leader said that we spent too much on bringing these sports to the Northern Territory and singled out cricket. Reading from his comments, it was certainly looking like cricket was to be axed if the CLP were to get up. However, we are working very hard to continue to build on the success. I will hand over to Mr Dillon for the detail. I do not know why Denis singled out cricket.

Mr MILLS: Do not worry about it, we are dealing with the future.

Mr DILLON: In 2006, for international cricket matches, there are ongoing negotiations with Cricket Australia. We have a couple of sets of dates in June and July that we are working on. The proposed

format will be a combination of one day and 20/20 matches. We are looking to have three to four international A teams, including Australia. The teams are not confirmed yet. We understand Cricket Australia is negotiating with a number of nations.

Mr MILLS: Have you any idea which nations are being spoken to?

Mr DILLON: Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India.

Mr HENDERSON: Sounds pretty good. If you decide you like cricket we can get you an invite.

Mr MILLS: If you decide you like cricket!

Mr HENDERSON: Denis did not like cricket. He singled them out.

Mr MILLS: What are you worried about that for?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not worried. We have priorities, we have delivered them

Mr MILLS: Get over it; it is finished. We are moving on.

Mr HENDERSON: To understand the future, you have to remember the past.

Mr MILLS: During the election, the member for Nightcliff promised an outdoor gym on the foreshore at Nightcliff.

Mr HENDERSON: Did she?

Mr MILLS: Yes. Are you aware of any funding allocated to meet this promise, and do you have any idea where this outdoor gym will be located?

Mr HENDERSON: It is a wonderful initiative if it was proposed by the member for Nightcliff. We had the Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival earlier this year.

Mr MILLS: Look, could you please scurry along?

Mr HENDERSON: We will get the detail. We certainly would have identified it in the media release. There was money allocated to it. Specifically where on the Nightcliff foreshore, I am sure that would be considered in discussions with the Darwin City Council.

Mr MILLS: I will check the comprehensive media release for all the details.

Mr HENDERSON: At least we made financial allocations in calendar years. You guys did not.

Mr MILLS: You are a remarkable bunch; there you go! Your government promised a new home for soccer away from Ross Park in Alice Springs. However, in your election announcements by seat, you have allocated \$0.5m to upgrade a soccer oval for the benefit of the Alice Springs soccer fraternity. Can you explain whether soccer will be getting a new home, or will the \$500 000 be spent upgrading existing facilities?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, we certainly did make a commitment of \$500 000 to improve soccer facilities. My advice is - and I am sure it would be shared by the member for Greatorex - that the soccer community in Alice Springs is absolutely ecstatic about this. We will be working with the soccer community and the Alice Springs Town Council to identify the appropriate site. It is good to see that we continue to invest in soccer across the Territory.

Mr MILLS: It is, no doubt about it.

Dr LIM: Football!

Mr HENDERSON: Football; it is very late.

Mr MILLS: We are actually after the details of obligation. So not much more detail?

Mr HENDERSON: It will appear, and it is a \$500 000 commitment.

Mr MILLS: Yes, okay. I will check the media release for all the details I need. It is going to be an interesting four years.

The Palmerston Magpies: I acknowledge the commitment that was made in the last election campaign by the now government to contribute \$2m to the provision of home ground facilities. I also acknowledge the extensive round of community consultations and deep consideration about the solution to this problem, which dragged on, surprisingly, for three-and-a-half years. By the time the \$2m was allocated, it was unable to provide what was originally intended. What was initially outlined could have been provided within the scope of \$2m but, because it dragged on, it is now in excessive of \$2.3m or \$2.4m. Will you make up the difference arising from your procrastination, or will it be the club that has to pay, or the university?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to Mr Dillon, but the \$2m is still there on the table.

Mr MILLS: I accept that. Had it been put on the table two years ago, we would have a fine facility. It was rammed right up against the election. There were hundreds of glossy brochures throughout Palmerston patting yourselves on the back, and it has escalated in cost to meet your election timetable.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is the money was paid in a grant to CDU in the last financial year, so they have \$2m in the bank.

Mr MILLS: I am fully aware of that. That is not the issue. The issue is if that had been released at an appropriate time without the delays, construction costs would have been fully met by that \$2m. By political delay, it has now been put into a time frame where it is going to cost \$2.3m to \$2.4m because you cannot get anyone to come in and do that work for \$2m. Two years back, people were craving for work and would have done it for less than \$2m.

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon who has the history of this. I am sure he can put the record straight.

Mr DILLON: The government committed \$2m, basically for development of a home ground for the Magpies at Palmerston. That commitment was made. There was no substantive delay that I am aware of. There are rising expectations amongst some people in Palmerston, maybe yourself included, that there will be extra facilities. I am not aware that there has been a cost blow-out.

Mr MILLS: You are not?

Mr DILLON: In a sense, you are asserting that. I am happy to take your advice ...

Mr MILLS: Well, information to follow then. If you have not received that advice, I am surprised.

Mr DILLON: This may be an issue as to the expectations of the facilities to be provided.

Mr MILLS: Is it your expectation then that seating is included in a home ground facility?

Mr HENDERSON: The advice I have is that we have an agreement with the Magpies. The scope of works in the agreement is as follows: the construction of a complex including seating, scoreboard, ablution blocks and change rooms, excluding clubhouse facilities; upgrade of the existing oval; fencing; car parking and ancillary works. That is what is in the agreement, and that is funded with the \$2m.

Mr MILLS: Well, no, in fact, it is not, minister. The \$2m will not provide seating. You need to have a look at the scope of works that now have a cost against them, which fit that description that you just read out. You cannot get anyone to build that for less than \$2.3m. The reason for that is that it is falling into a cycle where we are having difficulty getting contractors to come in to do work because they have more than enough on. Two years ago you would have saved yourselves some money.

Mr HENDERSON: Obviously, this is work in progress with the Magpies Football Club. We made a \$2m commitment; that \$2m is still there.

Mr MILLS: I accept that; there is no problem there. In fact, the former minister was fully aware of this issue. I report to you - and it can be backed up by witnesses - that he became aware of this issue and recognised the seriousness of it and supported the view that government will make up that difference to

ensure that seating, for example, is provided. You might need to check the commitment that was made informally at a meeting between the university and the football club.

Mr HENDERSON: I am happy to take it on board. All I can go on is the advice that I have. We will move forward with it in discussion with the Magpies.

Mr MILLS: All right. In the interests of time, I know there are a couple of other items. I will hold my questions at that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you may recall the shooting facilities in Alice Springs were under scrutiny for the Masters Games and had to be either refined or relocated. The pistol range has still not, some time later, been relocated. Could you please advise when the contract will be awarded, and when do you expect completion of the new pistol range?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I am aware this is an issue. I am not up-to-date on it at the moment. I will obtain some advice.

Mr DILLON: Mrs Braham, you are correct; there have been delays. There have been some issues with site clearance and the need for the pistol range to be consulted by the AAPA. My understanding is that those issues are largely resolved and we are now looking to identify a revised completion date. There will be some additional funding required that we are looking to source as well to ensure that we can do what we intended.

Mrs BRAHAM: So the contract has not been let?

Mr DILLON: No, it has not been let, but we are actively progressing it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can we look at some sort of completion this year perhaps?

Mr HENDERSON: I would very much hope so. I need to get some detail on it.

Mr DILLON: DIPE initially expected to go to tender in January. We will be doing all we can to ensure that we go to contract this year.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There being no further questions on Output 5.1, that concludes consideration of Output 5.1.

Output 5.2 - Northern Territory Institute of Sport

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.2, Northern Territory Institute of Sport. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: I have a number of questions but, in the interests of time I will just ask: which sports are currently in the NTIS schedule, and are there any sports that are to be brought in or dropped off?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mr Mills, there has been some recent work done to evaluate the sports that were being serviced by the institute. You will be, and the sports are, aware of the results of that assessment process. The selections were T1 hockey, T2 cricket, AFL, Rugby Union and Rugby League, T3 ten pin bowling and weightlifting, netball, tennis and cycling.

Mr MILLS: Are any of those new that were not included last?

Mr DILLON: They were all there before.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr MILLS: I will deal with that later.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, that concludes consideration of Output 5.2.

Output 5.3 - Events

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 5.3, Events. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, one question. Reflecting on my previous question about the international cricket fixtures, will the Australian cricket team, as we understand, be competing in Darwin?

Mr DILLON: Australia A Team will be competing.

Mr MILLS: Australia A?

Mr DILLON: Yes.

Mr MILLS: That is confirmed and committed?

Mr HENDERSON: No, it is proposed. It is still under discussion.

Mr MILLS: Are there any contractual arrangements? The point of our questioning last year was to get the details of the contractual arrangements between the Northern Territory government and the Australian Cricket Board for the fixtures. 'Proposal' worries me, and I believe it worries many people who want to know whether these things have some legal and binding substance, or are they press releases?

Mr DILLON: As I advised the committee earlier, negotiations are proceeding.

Mr MILLS: There are no contractual arrangements?

Mr DILLON: We have not finalised the arrangements. We are confident that there is a plan in place, but we have not signed a contract.

Mr MILLS: There was similar confidence referred to last year, where there was a very similar answer that the contractual arrangements were being developed - 12 months later the same. I believe Territorians would expect, in contrast with the assertions and the backslapping of government, that we need something more substantial in contractual arrangements so we can be sure of these things.

Mr HENDERSON: Two sides make a contract. We are working hard. I believe I went to Marrara and saw Bangladesh and Sri Lanka play in test matches. The runs are on the board, so to speak. I do not know why you are being so sceptical that this is not going to come off. They have been here; they have played. We have seen two test matches in Darwin and a one-day game. These negotiations are taking place. Further advice is negotiations each year are subject to ICC rulings and, regarding overall tests and one-day fixtures at an international level, are under the control of Cricket Australia. We are working towards that, and are very confident that we will see international cricket at Marrara next year, as we did when we saw the test team play Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Mr MILLS: Okay. I will leave it. Regarding Major Events, you are saying that your department does not have any involvement in V8 Supercars?

Mr DILLON: Yes, we do have an involvement – not the department but the portfolio – because the Territory Motor Sports Board is an entity that is actually owned and controlled by the minister and falls within the portfolio. The venue is within the portfolio, not the department. We work closely with Major Events, obviously, to ensure that the running of the V8s at Hidden Valley can happen.

Mr MILLS: Minister, how many Hot Passes to attend the V8 Supercar series did you personally give away while campaigning during the Territory election?

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, dear oh dear, that is an interesting question. I think there were - and whether they were allocated prior to the election or during the election I would have to go and check records - two to Wanguri and two to Leanyer Primary Schools.

Mr MILLS: How were they paid for?

Mr HENDERSON: I do believe that was an allocation that was made to me as minister.

Mr MILLS: Four of them?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions? I am just conscious of the time.

Mr MILLS: You will be checking whether they were distributed prior to the election or after the election? You said that you will investigate your reports.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes. I have to check the records, but yes, I donated two of those to Leanyer and two to Wanguri Primary Schools.

Mr MILLS: The Australia A team – I have not watched cricket as much as I used to in the past because it is changing a little now - is it our main team?

Mr HENDERSON: No, it is not the test team; it is the one just down from that.

Mr MILLS: Oh right. Okay.

Mr HENDERSON: But there are a lot of test players who will end up in the team if they are not ...

Mr MILLS: Undoubtedly. Okay. When we have the Arafura Games and the Masters Games, minister, are you able to inform us of how many government workers were given time off to work as volunteers?

Mr HENDERSON: I will seek advice on that. I am not sure.

Mr DILLON: Yes, we can provide that information.

Mr HENDERSON: Whilst we are looking for that, the volunteers did an absolutely magnificent job and were roundly acclaimed by everybody who participated and attended the venues. They did a great job!

Mr MILLS: I accept that. Thank you for the congratulations. I was also a volunteer.

Mr HENDERSON: Oh! You were too! Casuarina Pool.

Mr MILLS: Being asked to help people to their seats in Marrara Stadium. That is an art! So I compliment those who filled that role.

Mr DILLON: Mr Mills, may I just correct a previous answer. Weightlifting and cycling were new sports to T3. My apologies there.

In terms of staff seconded to the Arafura Games, we had 49 staff on a one-week placement, 31 on a one to two-week placement, four on an up-to-four-week placement, three on a one-to-three-month placement, and two on a three-to-six-month placement. Then we have a range of volunteers as well.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr MILLS: I will be fine. I will have to leave other questions.

Mrs BRAHAM: Madam Deputy Chair, I just have one query. If the member for Blain can keep asking whether Australia A is coming to Darwin, could I ask the minister when you are bringing the Demons to Darwin to play - and I do not want any comment on their performance at the moment.

Mr MILLS: The what?

Mrs BRAHAM: That is AFL.

Mr HENDERSON: Maybe we could arrange for St Kilda to play the Demons, because they are not going particularly well either at the moment, and it sounds like it is getting worse!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. That concludes consideration of this output group.

Non-output Specific Budget Related Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other non-output specific budget-related questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes. I have asked this in previous years and it should go on the record, I imagine, and be followed up. Detailed funding of the small grants to every sporting group across the Territory, right up to the peak body allocations: I would like to know exactly what has been given to every sporting group from the grassroots level right up to the peak body. Please do not read it out to me, but if you can provide that I would much appreciate that.

Mr HENDERSON: My advice, Mr Mills, is that is all up on the Internet on the departmental web site.

Mr MILLS: All of it is?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other questions on this output?

Mr MILLS: Yes. I would like a month-to-month breakdown of spending on projects and programs. How much was spent on print media promotions; electronic media; brochure production and direct mail; and on DVD or CD production? Month by month.

Mr DILLON: Are you talking about the sports area?

Mr MILLS: Yes.

Mr DILLON: I am not in a position to give you a month-by-month breakdown of it. I would suggest that it is perhaps – I was going to use the word unreasonable, but it is certainly an ambitious request.

Mr MILLS: What is the best you can do?

Mr DILLON: I will do my best to provide that information. I do have the actual figures for expenditure against those key categories, but perhaps if we take it on notice and we will do the best we can to give you a breakdown.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Just repeat the question on notice, please.

Mr MILLS: Please provide a breakdown of spending on projects and programs, allocating how much was spent on print media, electronic media, brochure production, and direct mail and on DVD and CD production.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated that he will take that question. It becomes No 5.16.

Mr MILLS: The next one will probably be on notice, too. Did your department or agency employ any consultants during 2004-05?

Mr DILLON: The answer is yes.

Mr MILLS: Who were the consultants? What was the nature of each consultancy? List consultancies awarded by certificate of exemption.

Mr DILLON: Perhaps we might take it on notice. I have most of that information here. What I do not have is the certificate of exemption information.

Mr MILLS: Okay. I am particularly interested in those.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Will you repeat the question, please?

Mr MILLS: Please list the consultants used by the department or agencies. What was the nature of each consultancy? List consultancies awarded by certificate of exemption.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That becomes question No 5.17.

Mr MILLS: In how many and in which consultancies were expressions of interest or tenders called before a person or body was engaged to carry out the promotion?

Mr HENDERSON: Would you repeat that, member for Blain? Expressions of interest or tenders would have to be called before someone was ...

Mr MILLS: Well, you would presume so.

Mr HENDERSON: You would presume so. Do you have any evidence that did not ...

Mr MILLS: It is a fair a reasonable question from opposition, however.

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, yes. I am just trying to be helpful.

Mr MILLS: I know you are.

Mr HENDERSON: If you have any concern where one was not, it would cut to the chase if you could identify that, because I would have thought that in all circumstances before a consultant is engaged ...

Mr MILLS: I would too. The previous line of questioning indicated that were some irregularities in procedure so that we have great confidence in public administration. It is simply a role of opposition to make these inquiries and have them satisfied. Do you want me to ask the question again?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, ask it again and I will get Mr Dillon to answer it.

Question on Notice

Mr MILLS: In how many and in which consultancies were expressions of interest or tenders called before a person or body was engaged to carry out the promotion?

Mr DILLON: My expectation is that the answer is zero, but we will take it on notice and include it with the rest of the questions on consultants.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That becomes question No 5.18.

Mr MILLS: Excuse me. You have a very strict procedure here. Do you want me to repeat it?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You repeated it.

Mr MILLS: I did. All right. Sometimes you call the number out before and sometimes after. I just need to be sure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister asked you to repeat it.

Mr MILLS: That is all right, just trying to help.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any other questions?

Mr MILLS: I will leave other questions that I have for later.

Mrs MILLER: I have one in the area of Housing Services. Minister, the Community Harmony program has been operating in Katherine for some time now. Is there any stipulation by this government in relation to the make-up of the executive of that Community Harmony group?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: We have already passed through that output.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is non-output specific, so it is allowable in the sense that we have passed through, but it is a catch-all at the end that can be used to this effect by a person who was not here at the time.

Mr DILLON: I ask Ms Angus to answer the question.

Ms ANGUS: I am sorry, but you will need to repeat it for me.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. The Community Harmony program has been operating in Katherine for some time, as you are aware. Is there any stipulation or instruction by this government in relation to the make-up of the executive of the Community Harmony program?

Ms ANGUS: Not from the program department, and not that we have ever been instructed by the government either.

Mrs MILLER: Right. The make-up of that Community Harmony program executive - say, for instance, in Katherine - would be purely up to the committee to decide?

Ms ANGUS: Yes. It is purely community initiated, and it is up to the committee to decide who chairs it and who makes up the executive.

Mrs MILLER: Is there any reason why there would not be access to minutes of those meetings? Are they some secret meeting?

Ms ANGUS: I cannot see where there would be. There may occasionally be some in-confidence discussions about an organisation. You would be aware, at the moment, Katherine's is an organisation that is currently a provider of the Community Harmony activity that may not be broadly discussed. But, no, I do not see any reason with that. That is at the discretion of each Community Harmony regional committee. Program management does not interfere at that level.

Mrs MILLER: That is good to know. If there is some blockage of information from the Community Harmony program executive, it actually flies in the face of what Community Harmony is about, does it not?

Ms ANGUS: If there is any difficulty in you obtaining information from the regional harmony group, I am more than happy to help facilitate access to that information.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other non-output questions? There being no further questions, the committee will now move on to the Housing Business Services, Business Line.

**HOUSING
OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – BUSINESS SERVICES
Business Line**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions regarding the Business Line, Housing Business Services. Are there any questions? I draw members' attention to the fact that we have seven minutes left.

Dr LIM: Minister, can you give me a breakdown of Territory Housing stock in terms of type of dwelling, how many people live in Territory Housing, and how long is the average waiting time depending on the size of dwelling? You have those figures in last year's budget but, in this year's budget papers you do not have any waiting times for public housing in one-, two- or three-bedroom homes.

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: You are asking for a breakdown of our stock?

Dr LIM: The stock in terms of size of dwelling; how many people are living in Territory Housing; how long are the average waiting times in terms of one-, two- or three-bedroom, or even four-bedroom residences.

Mr DILLON: We have that material here. It will take me 10 minutes to read it.

Dr LIM: Would you like to table that? Is that possible?

Mr DILLON: I would be more than happy to table that information.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is a tabled paper.

Mr DILLON: What I do not have here are the waiting times; however, we may have that in a separate piece of paper. I will be happy to table the waiting times as well.

Dr LIM: What increase in public housing-related complaints has there been for all major urban centres?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Ms Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Fiona Chamberlain. Are you talking about complaints specifically in regard to one issue, Dr Lim, or generally?

Dr LIM: Generally. Let me use a rather derogatory term if I may: 'neighbours from hell'. People complained. You have written complaints, telephone complaints, and complaints from members of parliament to the department. Has there been an increase in those formal complaints? I am sure you would receive lots of informal complaints as well.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Yes. I have an estimate here. Unfortunately, we do not collect those statistics in our system, but we do collect them manually. My feeling is that, in fact, complaints are reducing rather than increasing. However, we do get approximately 98 complaints per month across the Territory.

Dr LIM: I am curious to hear that this information is collected manually only, considering the issue that was raised regarding Larapinta Estate last year and the hullabaloo there was in Alice Springs about antisocial behaviour amongst people living in that area. There should be a system in place to monitor and maintain these figures so that we would know how the department is performing and what residents are doing.

Mr HENDERSON: My understanding is that, obviously, the department deals with the issues as they arise and policies are adjusted accordingly. My understanding is that the department did deal proactively with those issues. The number of complaints could be 10, 20, 50, but the responsibility of the department is to actually deal with the issue. The department has processes, protocols and legislation under which they do deal with those issues.

Dr LIM: Minister, I put to you that, if the information is collected manually - and I do not know how reliable the manual system is or whether every case that is reported is recorded - how do you know whether you improve from year to year? We get anecdotal evidence to say that yes, we think it is improving, but do you know?

Mr HENDERSON: I take advice from the department. It is important to deal with the issues rather than just collect statistics. I am comfortable that the department does deal with those issues, but I am also conscious - as a local member myself I have had my fair share of representing neighbours who have problem neighbours next door - that it is an issue that needs constant attention. I am confident that the department is doing that.

Dr LIM: In fact, only today, my office has written to Territory Housing with three complaints. The complaints are always there. Does the department have a formal system of maintaining the data?

Mr HENDERSON: I will refer to Mr Dillon and Ms Chamberlain.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, yes, we do have a formal system that is addressing issues as they arise. We do that proactively. Whether there is one complaint or 20, we address the issue. It is fair to say, in the last two to three years, we have increased the intensity of our proactivity in addressing neighbourhood nuisance issues. We have a number of initiatives in place to deal with them. We are dealing with, obviously, a complex and mobile, fluid situation. However, our system is: address each and every issue as it arises to the best of our ability. The suggestion that we should monitor complaints runs the risk that it gives you false information.

Dr LIM: Well, I dispute that. For instance, one of the complaints that I am putting to your department today relates to a person who complained to the department only several weeks ago. I made a personal house visit to that complainant and contacted the department. The department went out there, sort of sorted it out and, unfortunately, the whole pattern has reoccurred. Unless you maintain files and data, you are not going to know. I am asking: what sort of a formal process do you have?

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, our tenancy management and data management systems basically focus on each of our assets. We do maintain and have a history of what has gone on in a particular asset that allows us to monitor developments over time. We can tell you if a particular tenant has had complaints against him or her six or nine months ago. Yes, we actively manage that. What we do not do is count, willy-nilly, the number of complaints that come in generally, because that does not help us to target our efforts.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, that concludes time. We have actually gone over time. I want to thank the minister and staff of CDSCA, I will call it in abbreviation, if that is all right. Thank you all for your time here at this estimates session. The Estimates Committee will resume at 1.45 pm for consideration of minister Vatskalis.

The committee suspended.

BUSINESS, INDUSTRY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Mr CHAIRMAN: I call this meeting to order. I welcome the minister. I note from the schedule that you will be answering questions on Minerals and Energy, Industry Services and Fisheries Industry Services which sit within the department of Business, Industry and Resource Development. I invite you, minister, to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement if you so wish.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to make some opening remarks about how we will deal with questions that relate to my portfolio. There following areas within in DBIRD that I have responsibility for are Mines and Energy and Primary Industry and Fisheries. I am also responsible for the food group.

You would be aware that the structure of the department's output groups has changed this year. This is as a result of the department's reviewing its outcome framework. The output groups focus on the areas of Development and Management, specifically sustainable development of the Territory's resources, enhanced capacity and performance of business and industry sectors, and sustainable and responsible management of Territory resources. My colleague, minister Henderson, has already address questions relating to whole-of-agency matters, and those relating to development Output Groups 3, 4 and 5.

I introduce to the committee the officials here with me this afternoon: Mike Burgess, Chief Executive Officer; Mr Bernard Ho, Chief Financial Officer; Mr Rod Gobbey, General Manager, Primary Industry; Mr John Carroll, General Manager, Minerals and Energy; and Mr Richard Sellers, Executive Director, Fisheries. I will answer the committee's questions which relate to government policy, but may call upon these, or other departmental officials, to respond to operational issues.

The Minerals and Energy Group has recently been restructured to provide greater clarity for the department and for the industries it serves on development and management responsibilities. The Minerals and Energy Development Output supports the growth of exploration and sustainable development for the Northern Territory mineral and also petroleum resources, and facilitates the efficient and economic use of energy.

Please note that the portion of the funding allocated to the Mt Todd rehabilitation in 2005-06 has been incorrectly attributed to this output, and should have been attributed to Output Group 2.0.

The Minerals and Energy Management Output comprises a range of services including primary responsibility for delivering strategic services which regulate mining and petroleum tenure, inspection and audits to ensure best practice in environmental management, workplace safety, especially in regard to occupational health and safety, and the evaluation and reduction of environmental impacts arising from mine sites. With the review of the *Mining Act* well under way, we are focused on providing a regulatory environment which meets community needs and expectations and supports the Northern Territory's economic development.

We are committed to environmental best practice and we will see through the rehabilitation of the Mt Todd mine site. In excess of \$1m will be spent on the site on an initial program of works which will help minimise the flow of pollutants and heavy metals from the site into the Edith River system during the coming Wet Season, and deal with a number of urgent maintenance issues.

The Primary Industry and Development Output provides delivery of a range of strategic services which facilitate profitable and sustainable primary industries in the Northern Territory and maintains access to markets for animals, plants, and animal and plant products. Outcomes are achieved through strategies developed in partnership with peak industry associations: focused research and development programs; specific programs that support indigenous, pastoral and horticultural development; effective extension services; and to maintaining targeted programs to monitor, detect and respond to emergency and endemic animal and plant pests and diseases. We are currently working with industry to develop a Northern Territory bio-security strategy that will enhance plant, pest and disease incursion management capabilities and support the horticultural [inaudible] group to develop a strategic direction for the horticultural industry.

The Fisheries Development Output focuses on aquaculture development and the facilitation of services for the aquaculture industry. This service includes policy development and implementation; granting and maintenance of licenses; development of formal management plans; advice on new investment opportunities and development of production technologies through aquaculture research.

The Fisheries Management Output manages the Northern Territory's aquatic resources for the provision of information and assistance to the community, government and the fishing industry sectors to support sustainable development. The services include policy development and implementation; research; the granting and maintenance of licenses; the development and implementation of fishery management arrangements; and the monitoring and control of aquatic pests and disease issues.

I now turn to my Multicultural Affairs portfolio. Multicultural advancement is of great importance to the Territory, given our very diverse society. We have achieved a great deal this year with new initiatives such as the launch of the Territory's first multicultural policy, *Building on the Territory's Diversity*, and implementation of the new ethnic communities' facilities development program.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs also continues to provide important services such as the Northern Territory Interpreter and Translation Service, the Overseas Qualifications Unit, and cross-cultural awareness training. Furthermore, important grants are provided to all projects or initiatives that benefit our multicultural society through the Multicultural Affairs Sponsorship Program, the Cultural and Linguistic Awards, the Charles See Kee Awards and Harmony Day funding.

I will leave my opening comments there, and look forward to the questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister, for that comprehensive opening statement. Are there any questions in regard to that statement?

Mrs MILLER: No, there is not, but I find it very interesting. It sounded pretty good, like everything is rosy in the Primary Industries and Fisheries area. However, I will reserve my judgment until after the questions have been answered.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am sure you will not be disappointed.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - DEVELOPMENT **Output 1.1 - Minerals and Energy**

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Development, Output 1.1 Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Just a few. Minister, how many exploration licences were issued by your department in 2004-05?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, member for Katherine. Exploration in the Northern Territory has increased significantly in the past year. The ABS released the statistics for the March quarter and we have had an increase of 21.5% in the 2003-04 March quarter. \$9.6m was spent on mineral exploration in the Territory during the 2004-05 March quarter. This is actually a 44.7% increase compared to the same period last year. I would like to tell you that the petroleum exploration has increased by 193%, which is a significant increase in mineral exploration and spending in the Territory. I ask Mr Burgess to provide you the exact number in the Territory.

Mr BURGESS: Mike Burgess, chief executive. In relation to exploration licences, the way in which the output is structured actually falls into output 7 through our titles management arrangements. However, we can refer that information we have from that output to deal with the issue now.

Mrs MILLER: That is fine. If it can be done by the end of the session, that would be fine.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, in access to land for mineral exploration, there are currently 767 granted exploration licences in the Northern Territory covering 300 000 km². This is the highest number since June 1989. At that time, there were 797 exploration licences. In June 2000, we had only 285. This is the second largest number of mineral exploration licences in the Territory since 1989.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, do you have the information you are seeking or do you wish to give notice of the question?

Mrs MILLER: No, I have the information that I was seeking, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what criteria applies when you are making an application for an exploration licence? For example, can I walk in and get one?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. Anybody in the Territory can walk in to the department and lodge an application for mineral exploration. If you give the necessary information and complete the forms, you can apply and it will be considered by the department. If there are no problems such as it being Aboriginal land or anything else, the department will grant you an exploration licence.

Mrs MILLER: Of those 767 applications for exploration, that could be Joe Bloggs, like me, who wants to go out and dig up some coins or some rocks at Pine Creek? Is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember that with the application for mineral exploration, you have to provide information and some advice to the department about what you are going to do, when you are going to do it and how much money you are going to spend. It is not an application just to look for something or fossick. You have to provide a schedule of what you are going to do and how much you are going to spend.

Mrs MILLER: Out of those 767 who have applied for a licence to explore, how many are major companies?

Mr VATSKALIS: I take it on notice. What we have found out recently is the major companies do not do the exploration any more. The exploration has been somehow outsourced to small operators who make the findings and then negotiate the sale of the licences - or the selling of the lease if they have applied for a tenement - to the big companies. We know, for example, with Bootu Creek mine, the person who discovered the manganese resources was Neil Scriven who then negotiated with Trevor Tennant who represented a bigger company, and Trevor Tennant bought all the rights and established Bootu Creek.

We have seen a change now in trends all over the world. The major companies do not spend money on exploration; it is the small explorers who do the exploration and then negotiate with the big companies to sell their explorations and their findings. We can provide that information.

Mr CARROLL: John Carroll. We would need some criteria, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: If we could have some criteria – what do you mean by big company?

Mrs MILLER: I mean eliminating all of the persons like myself who wanted to go out and dig a hole and look for some minerals. Are they listed on the stock exchange?

Mr CARROLL: Generally, they are listed on the stock exchange. If you want us to go by market capitalisation, for example, there would be a lot of work in doing that.

Mrs MILLER: Right.

Mr CARROLL: As the minister said, lots of exploration companies have farming arrangements so it might be the small company explorers and a large company, as in the case of Bootu Creek where GEMCO bought into Bootu Creek Resources at the minerals end. That is a regular occurrence in the industry.

Mr VATSKALIS: To qualify your question, I do not know anything about mineral exploration, so if I walked in and applied for an exploration licence, it means nothing to anybody. What I am going to find? However, the people who apply obviously have the information, the background, they are a geologist, they have done it before so they know what they are looking for. Joe Bloggs on the street will not just walk in. He can, but what is the point?

Mrs MILLER: What I am trying to clarify is that you are saying it is the highest number of exploration licences issued since 1989. What I am trying to determine is how serious these people are about exploring.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, if someone is exploring the Territory, they are serious. We have examples such as the one I used before of Nick Scriven being serious about exploring for manganese. He found manganese and then he sold it out to another company. If they go out and commit money on mineral exploration, obviously they are serious about exploring otherwise they are throwing money away.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, are we still at a question on notice? I believe we are exploring the definition of the business summary?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr CARROLL: The trouble we have at the moment is that we do not have the criteria to make an assessment against that.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a big company.

Mrs MILLER: If it is going to take a lot of detailed work, I am quite happy with the explanation I have been given so far.

When issuing an exploration licence, do they stipulate what they are looking for?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is a generic exploration licence. People actually apply for an exploratory licence on a particular parcel, then go and explore. They might have an idea of what they are going to find because they have the information from the department and their own information. We have had cases where people have been looking for phosphate and have discovered gold, or they were looking for iron ore and discovered other minerals. The exploration licence is generic. If you are applying for an exploration licence, you do not put a specific element or a particular mineral.

Mrs MILLER: That brings me to another question. The Chief Minister is on record as saying that there will be no more uranium mining in the Northern Territory. If that is so, why are we still issuing exploration licences that cover uranium and other minerals? Why would any prospective developer bother to go ahead and explore for uranium if they did not think they were going to be able to mine that?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I stated before, member for Katherine, when a person comes to the Northern Territory and applies for a mineral exploration, he applies for a mineral exploration for generic elements. There is no specific applying for minerals exploration for iron ore or diamonds or anything else. Of course, in the Northern Territory, because we have plenty of uranium, you can actually explore for iron ore and you find uranium in different quantities. To give you an example, Arafura Resources was exploring for sulphur phosphate, which they discovered. At the same time, within the phosphate there is uranium in very small

quantities. In some cases, it might not even be commercially viable to mine this uranium. We cannot stop people applying for exploration for minerals. As I said before, it is a generic one; they do not have to specify. They go and look for something and they might find something else. People can look for iron ore and they find, in the same parcel, manganese in bigger quantities than iron ore. It is more commercially viable to mine manganese rather than iron ore. We cannot and do not specify a particular mineral on the application or when we grant the mineral exploration licence.

Mr MILLS: Do those seeking applications nominate?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, there is no facility to nominate for a particular mineral. I do not have a copy of the application. The application does not specify 'please specify particular mineral'. It is generic.

Mr MILLS: So the department has no idea what they are looking for?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said before, the department has geological information and people come and apply. Of course, the department will find out what they discovered when they actually apply for a mining tenement to mine manganese, iron ore or diamonds or anything else.

Mr MILLS: So the department would know what they were looking for?

Mr VATSKALIS: When they apply for a mining tenement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I thought you would come in ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, no, I am more than happy to open it to the entire committee, then the member for Nelson and everyone else gets a turn and it stops your shadow minister.

Mr MILLS: Yes, all right.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, in your reply, you said yourself that there is a lot of uranium in the Northern Territory. Do you think that the Northern Territory is in a financial position to be able to ignore the economic benefit of uranium mining? Have you calculated the economic benefit that uranium would be to the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you asking me my personal opinion, or are you asking me something to do with the budget?

Mrs MILLER: I will ask you both.

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot give you my personal opinion because it is not in the budget. If the question relates to the budget, I am very happy to answer it. My personal opinion is not listed anywhere in any of the other questions.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. I will put that one in one of the other outputs later on.

In the budget 2005-06, \$17.4m is allocated for development; the 2004-05 estimates is \$16.98m. What is that additional \$418 000 allocated to?

Mr VATSKALIS: The variation is \$1.4m plus funding from the Australian government for the Renewable Remote Power Regeneration program; \$176 000 for the effective management and rehabilitation of Mt Todd mine site; \$64 000 additional resources for wages inflation productivity dividend - and out of that less \$950 000 for one-off carry forward of unspent renewable energy funds from 2003-04 to 2004-05; and less \$129 000 for budget transfers within a division between sub-outputs. There are some smaller amounts. It is plus and minus money that they moved in and out of the budget.

Mrs MILLER: Can you provide financial details of the recent road show which you, departmental officials, and industry representatives visited in Brisbane, Sydney and Perth? How much did the road show cost? How much of this road show was taken up promoting uranium exploration? What outcomes have you had from the first part of this road show?

Mr VATSKALIS: Let me correct something. The road show was not to promote specific exploration for any particular mineral. The road show was to promote exploration in the Northern Territory. I have explained that, during that road show, we met with people who intend to mine for diamonds, iron ore, and other minerals such as mineral sands. All of these people were invited to the Territory. The road show was an initiative that we took and had an excellent response from the industry here in the Territory and also interstate.

I went with Richard Brescianini, the Director of the Northern Territory Geological Survey, Jerry Whitfield, the Director of Titles, Neville Henwood from the Northern Territory Mineral Council, Trevor Tennant, the Managing Director of Bootu Creek Resources and Rod Elvish from Compass Resources. They accompanied the department to provide a third party endorsement. We met with a significant number of people in Perth, Sydney and Brisbane. We had eight events with around 700 participants. The cost of all three road shows was below \$40 000, because we had a number of strategic partnerships with organisations like KPMG, Clayton Utz, the Association of Mining Exploration Companies and the Sydney Mining Club.

The benefit we received was, as outlined before, a significant increase in mineral exploration of the Territory in the pastoral corridors, not only for minerals but also petroleum. My role there was to promote the government's support for mining and mineral exploration of the Territory. I presented the overall policy of the government to promote and support mining in the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: So you had significant interest shown from those road shows?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, not only during the road show, but we had articles in mining magazines, and have also been invited to address a conference related to mining in Perth in the next few days.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what budget allocation is there for the balance of this road show to visit Melbourne and Adelaide? Who will be participating in this road show?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not decided the dates, or who is going to come. However, all of this money will come from within existing resources.

Mrs MILLER: Hiding in industry and resources, is it, this one?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no, it is not hiding, for the simple reason we do not ...

Mrs MILLER: You have allocated it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, we do not know who is coming or when we are going to go. The department is prepared because it has existing resources to address these kinds of promotional opportunities, and we will do it within existing resources. You can easily find out, next estimates when you will ask the same questions, and we will tell you exactly how much money we spent.

Mrs MILLER: When are you planning to go on the rest of this road show to complete it?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is yet to be decided together with the department what is the most appropriate time. We are trying to coincide with mining events that take place at these cities so we can attract a bigger audience, rather than doing it *ad hoc*.

Mrs MILLER: How much of the Geological Survey Division's work program funding is spent on gathering data and producing geological datasets for the uranium sector?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: We do not have a specific figure because we collect data for a whole range of activity with the NT Geological Survey. There is some data that has been collected and I can provide, if you would like it separately, the information we have that has been collected and the costs - probably an estimate of the costs - that it took to gather it. It was not in the last financial year most of it; it has been collected over a number of years.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, do you want me to ...

Mr CARROLL: You want that to be a question on notice, Mr Chairman?

Question on Notice

Mrs MILLER: Would you please provide the Geological Survey Division's work program on gathering data and producing geological data sets for the uranium sector and the costs involved?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do we accept that as a question taken on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, certainly. Member for Katherine, I also would like to point out that the total expenses over a four-year program is \$15.2m and we call this project Building the Territory Resources Base.

Mrs MILLER: Excuse me just one moment, minister. What is that for? That \$15.2m – is this in relation to the question on notice?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before we proceed to further information, that question that was taken on notice I will allocate that No 8.1.

Mrs MILLER: I am sure the Minerals Foundation would love \$15.2m, so I do not think it is referring to that is it?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Mineral Foundation?

Mrs MILLER: You are not referring to \$15.2m are you, to this work program now? You are referring to something else, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. And your question on notice?

Mrs MILLER: I have finished.

Mr CARROLL: Minister, if I can just correct that so we are all clear? Provide NT geological survey work program on data and geological data sets relating to uranium and how much it costs?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please.

Mr VATSKALIS: Related to uranium only?

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: My apologies. I was referring to general geotechnical data.

Mrs MILLER: No, uranium only.

Minister, as you know, yellow cake is transported from South Australia through the Northern Territory for export. Can you tell me what the economic benefit of this transportation is to the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: I suppose this yellow cake is produced in South Australia and utilises train or other transport that comes to the Territory and goes through the port. If it is going to be of any economic benefit to the Territory, transport would be where the money is spent in the Territory – during the transport and loading at the port. Probably the minister responsible for ports will be able to give you this answer rather than me.

Mrs MILLER: So you are not sure?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely! Because it is not mined here; it is transported and loaded at the port.

Mrs MILLER: I am not sure if this one belongs here. I am sure you will pull me up if it does not. Minister, how much is budgeted for the rehabilitation of Mt Todd in this next 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: As you are aware, the government has allocated \$1.3m to be spent in the Dry in the next few months to address some of the issues to avoid any leaching from the different areas in Mt Todd to

the Edith River. That is on top of \$374 000 for ongoing maintenance to 2005-06. The \$1.3m is to address specific areas within the Mt Todd area; the \$374 000 is actually to address some issues like the pipes, the pumps, the ongoing maintenance, and the wages of the people specifically dealing now with Mt Todd. As you are aware, we have appointed a person to be in charge of the Mt Todd rehabilitation project, who is actually overseeing the maintenance and the activities and work to be undertaken in the Mt Todd area.

I cannot give you an answer on the overall budget because, as I said before, it is going to be expensive - it is going to be very expensive. However, at least we have started addressing some of the immediate problems, after we had discussions with the industry, stakeholders, Katherine Town Council, and AFANT. I believe you were involved with that and you went through the mine and had a look, and you understand very well how big the problem is.

Mrs MILLER: Has an EPA been done on the mine site?

Mr VATSKALIS: A what?

Mrs MILLER: An environmental impact study of what is happening there now?

Mr VATSKALIS: That should have been done when the mine opened and that would probably have addressed issue of the very inadequate environmental bond. However, I am not aware if an EIS was done at the time and at what level. Mr Burgess.

Mr BURGESS: As a part of the very first parts of work that the Mt Todd Rehabilitation Mine Reference Group did was work with consultant, Corinne Unger from Queensland to help us develop terms of reference for a rehabilitation plan. That early work that Corinne has done has produced a risk matrix for all the environmental and other issues on the site and we are now working through those to develop a long-term rehabilitation plan. We have sought and gained approval from the government to spend money to address the most high risk areas on the site this Dry Season. A draft report has been prepared by a consultant. That is being discussed by the reference group and they have approved the initial set of works to be done this Dry Season.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, an environmental impact statement is done usually when a mine is about to open. It is not done when the mine has become a disaster and we are trying to address the issue. It is a bit too late.

Mrs MILLER: The draft report that has been done, is it available to the public?

Mr BURGESS: The intention is to make that available in the public domain. It is just because we have been addressing these issues in sequence and rapidly, and trying to make sure we have works on the ground this Dry Season, and the consultant has been away overseas for the last month or so, we have not been able to finalise the report. We hope to do that with her shortly, and then it will be in the public domain.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I have to get this really clear: there is \$1.3m allocated in the 2005-06 Budget ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, 2004-05 Budget.

Mrs MILLER: 2004-05, okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: What is for the 2005-06 Budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$374 000 for ongoing maintenance of equipment and material on site.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. That is going to take a very small part of the rehabilitation. What ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The \$374 000 is allocated to address the issue with pumps because we have to pump water from one flotation pond to another so it will not escape into the river during heavy rain, and we have to address repairing pumps and pipelines. That is maintenance. The \$1.3m is additional money put in the 2004-05 Budget to do work in the heap leach area and some of the other areas because they are damaged, and if we have a big Wet Season next year, things are going to leach into the Edith River. This is additional money; \$1.3m is money allocated now to address some of these issues urgently.

Mrs MILLER: Have you any idea what has to go into the forward estimates for ongoing rehabilitation of Mt Todd?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, for the simple reason that the report has not been finalised. When the report is finalised and we know exactly what we have to do to address the issues, then we will make a decision.

Mr BURGESS: I can add to that. Some of the issues identified by the independent consultant indicate that we will have to do some extensive monitoring and testing of what is on the site so that we can formulate a complete rehabilitation plan. It is likely that we will need to undertake that over a 12-month period before we can then cost out the more comprehensive rehabilitation elements for ongoing Dry Seasons.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. I know it is going to take a lot of money.

Mr VATSKALIS: And a lot of time. Unfortunately, there is not the money in the environmental bond to address these issues, and they were never asked for a sufficient bond. However, we are asking other mines to address these issues.

Mrs MILLER: So this incident will not be repeated in the future?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not as long as this government is in power.

Mrs MILLER: In Budget Paper No 3 at page 143 in your performance measures, minister, for 2004-05, you have listed 18 major mining and petroleum projects as having been supported by facilitation and awareness services. Could you list those 18 and provide details of the cost of those major projects?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take this one on notice because you are asking for detailed information, which we do not have to hand.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat the question, please?

Mrs MILLER: Yes. In your performance measures for 2004-05, you have listed 18 major mining and petroleum projects as having been supported by facilitation and awareness services. Could you please list those 18 and provide details of the cost of those major projects?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you accept that as a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, I allocate the question No 8.2.

Mrs MILLER: Still in the Katherine region, minister. As you are aware, there is a lot of interest in the reopening of Maud Creek mine. It is situated in the upper catchment of the Katherine River system near Katherine Gorge. How are you addressing the genuine concerns that are expressed by the people in Katherine in safeguarding the water supply from any contamination? How are you going to monitor the development of Maud Creek to safeguard it against any breaches of the *Mining Act*?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, the department has not received any information from the current owner of the mine about starting operation of the mine. We have not received a notice of intent yet. There may be a lot of talk about opening it; the reality is, nothing is concrete. Until the department receives a notice of intent to operate, then it will start putting the operators through different processes, I cannot really say that the mine will start.

Previous discussions with previous operators have indicated two modes of operation. One was actually to mine, crush and mill the ore and take it to Halls Creek in Western Australia which, in that case, is not going to require a lot of water and there is not going to be effluent from site. The other, of course, was to do it on site. One thing I will say is that, because I am aware of the location of the mine, and of the possibility of the mine contaminating the water table, especially near the Katherine area, the department will put the

mine through a rigorous process of environmental impact assessment to ensure that no adverse effect will happen through the operation of the mine.

Mrs MILLER: You are saying that, at this particular point of time, there is no notice of intent? How does the department monitor what is happening there at the moment? Do you just take it on face value that they are doing the right thing?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because the mine is not yet ready. They might do some exploration, but the mine should not be operating. If they are operating now, they break the law.

Mrs MILLER: How does the department find out about that?

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister. We had an inspector visit the site in the last month. The report I got back was that there were no issues of concern. The visit was about looking at what is happening there now, and also in preparation for when we do receive the notice of intent. I can confirm that this morning I checked whether there had been a notice of intent received, and we do not have one yet. We do not have a mining plan yet, so there is nothing for us to respond to.

In relation to environmental issues, the assessment of the notice of intent will be assessed by the Office of Environment and Heritage, not by us. When they go through the process and come up with the recommendations, the action they recommend will be the action that will be put in the mining management plan that they have to follow. So it will be an independent assessment by the Office of Environment and Heritage on environmental issues.

Mrs MILLER: When you went to Katherine - because I am not sure of the process and how you are able to monitor what happens at these sites - did you go down of your own accord? Do you go of your own accord, or does somebody contact you to go and have a look?

Mr CARROLL: I did not go, so I should be careful of using the word 'we'. Our inspector, who is a mining officer qualified in mining issues, went because we were aware that there was significant interest in the project in the Katherine district. We knew that Katherine people were concerned about the potential impact of the mine site and the activities that have been carried out there in the past in terms of the water catchment area. We wanted to be informed about what was happening there now. Also, a dual purpose of the visit was to ensure that we had baseline data so that when we get our notice of intent application we have people understanding what is happening on the ground when they read the application and assessment.

Mrs MILLER: So that we do not have a repeat of Mt Todd ever again in the Territory, the process in the future would be that, once they have lodged their notice of intent, that is when the procedures are set in place?

Mr VATSKALIS: Their notice of intent triggers the requirement under the Northern Territory *Environmental Assessment Act*, so everything goes through the department of Environment for assessment. In addition to that, we have a division of the department to monitor different stages of the mine. We have the Authorisation Division which ensures all operations undergo a proper environmental assessment before they start the operation. Then we have a Compliance Division which ensures the mining operation is adhering to the approved operational plans when they are put in place. Then we have an Evaluation Division which looks after [inaudible] sites and potential issues, and the Securities committee which looks at the mining activities and establishes security. That is an independent committee, not the minister's office that says how much these people have to put as a security bond for rehabilitation purposes in the future. The notice of intent triggers the whole process, the Environment Office and everything else.

Mrs MILLER: Once they have done the EIS and they start and have to post a bond, how do you assess the value of the mine? How do you determine what the bond is going to be?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Securities Assessment Board looks at the mining activities, the risk factors associated with that, and then puts in place a bond. What will then happen, if a mine closes tomorrow, we should be able to return the mine and the area to its previous condition.

Mrs MILLER: Unless they post that bond, they cannot start?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. The bond is a good idea, because the risk factor might get bigger as the operation of the mine expands. Annually, we go back and look at it and we say: 'Yes, it is a bigger problem

now to rehabilitate', so we increase the bond. Or we decrease it. If it scales down the operation, the risk factor decreases.

Mrs MILLER: So, they pay a bond for the whole value of the mining process, or is it in stages?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the bond is posted. They are advised how much the environmental bond is, and they actually have to give us a security on that.

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister? When they put their mining management plan in, an assessment is made of what activities are going to happen over the coming 12 months and they have to put up a bond to cover that. At the end of that 12 months, and on a rolling 12-months basis, it is reassessed and the bond is posted to cover the level of disturbance and activity so that, at any point of time, the amount of money held in securities equals the cost of getting the site rehabilitated. Over the life of the mine, the money goes up and down, but it is all related to work that has to be done to get the site back to the state it needs to be in rehabilitation objectives.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CARROLL: That is different from the old *Mining Management Act* where a bond was assessed at the beginning and stayed in place for the life of the mine. Under the current *Mining Management Act* of 2001, there is this annual process of plans, reassessment of securities, and ensuring that the securities are paid and that the amount of money held at any point in time can have the site rehabilitated.

Mrs MILLER: That is the point I wanted to make and get very clear because, if you were looking at the value of a mine before they started their production, and you were going to put a bond on that was an unbelievably expensive bond ...

Mr CARROLL: You will not get a mine.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is true. However, at the same time, we actually put an appropriate bond on the mine because, in the case of Mt Todd mine, let us say, if they do something really stupid and affect the Katherine water table, how much is it going to cost the government to rectify that? Why should the taxpayers pay for something that the private company caused? We are not trying to make life difficult for mines, but we are trying to make sure that we evaluate the potential risk of the operation of the mine and put an appropriate bond in place so if they pack up and go tomorrow there will be enough money in the bank to rectify and bring the mine back to its original condition.

Mrs MILLER: The seriousness of Maud Creek is that it is within two or three hours ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mrs MILLER: ... and the water is contaminated.

Mr VATSKALIS: If we put the bond at the beginning of life of the mine and, let us say it is \$1m in 2005 dollar value, and the mine goes for 10 years. In 10 years time, it should be a different price to fix things up. You cannot rehabilitate the mine. So, adjusting it annually reflects a real value to rehabilitate the mine site.

Mrs MILLER: I am sure we are going to be watching Maud Creek with a great deal of interest.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, that finishes my questions on Output 1.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions for consideration on Output 1.1?

Mr WOOD: Yes, Mr Chairman. Why will your government not allow any more uranium mines in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, you are well aware that the Labor Party policy in the Northern Territory is not to allow any new uranium mines. That has been in place for many years.

Mr WOOD: That is not the question. Why won't the Northern Territory government allow any more mines? What is the scientific reason; not the policy reason?

Mr VATSKALIS: The government in the Northern Territory is the Labor government. The Labor government has a policy in place that says we will not allow any new mines to operate in the Territory, which is consistent with the national policy of the Labor Party.

Mr WOOD: Why did Maggie Hickey, who was the leader of the Labor Party, and also Bob Collins, who was also leader of the Territory Labor Party, support more mining exploration of uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: We support mining exploration.

Mr WOOD: Well, mining of uranium, if you want?

Mr VATSKALIS: That was their opinion. If tomorrow the conference of the Northern Territory Labor Party makes a change of policy, that is a different story. However, the current policy of the Northern Territory ALP is no new uranium mines.

Mr WOOD: Maggie Hickey was the leader of the Labor Party within those last 18 years, and your party agreed to uranium mines.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, she supported it.

Mr VATSKALIS: The policy of the Northern Territory Labor Party is no new uranium mines, and it has not changed for a number of years.

Mr WOOD: Okay. What is the scientific reason behind that? Why three, not two, not four?

Mr VATSKALIS: This is a policy issue that a political party has made a decision on, and this is the policy that this government is going to stick by.

Mr WOOD: I understand that. You are the Mines and Energy minister. Give me the scientific reason as to why? There must be reasons other than just 'our great leaders in Canberra have said no'.

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, it is a policy decision. All right? The policy stands. Let me put it another way. We have had a federal Liberal government in Canberra for the past 10 years and I have not seen any new uranium mine opening anywhere else in Australia. What is the scientific reason for that?

Mr WOOD: I do not know, maybe nobody asked.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is a policy decision.

Mr WOOD: Are they ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a policy decision made by political parties and it is not ...

Mr WOOD: It is your policy – three mines, isn't it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, it says no new mines. We have three mines; that is what the Labor Party said. No new mines. If it were four there would be four; if it were five there would be five, but what the Labor Party said is that there are three uranium mines in Australia, we do not support any more. We said in the Territory that we do not support any new mines in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Surely you can give us the reason why?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have explained to you. It is a policy decision of a political party.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but they must have a reason for having a policy decision. They do not just come out of the sky and say ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, join the Labor Party, come to the conference, and you can argue scientifically then.

Mr WOOD: Is it a secret conference? You do not want to explain your party's policies to the public?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not a secret conference; it is open to all members of the Labor Party.

Mr WOOD: And you will not explain that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are welcome to join the Labor Party, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I could not afford the membership fee.

Mr VATSKALIS: On your salary?

Mr WOOD: Yes, all right. I believe people will say that is a terrible answer. Surely you, as minister, can give a scientific reason why. Not policy – why. That is what people want to hear. If that is the way you want it then I will just ask you ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, the decision was made on policy grounds ...

Mr WOOD: It is an 18-year-old policy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I agree with that ...

Mr WOOD: Things have changed in this world since then ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with that and, until the policy changes, that is our policy. I know there are people out there asking for a change of policy, including some leaders of states. I am happy with that. If they bring it to the national conference and they change the policy, then I will be happy with that too. Then we will look at our own policy and will consider it. It is a policy issue. There are reasons ...

Mr WOOD: Why can you not have your own policy?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Australian Labor Party policy is not a secret document. You can access it, you find out the reasons why the Labor Party said no to new uranium mines.

Mr WOOD: Can you table that?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is no point in tabling that. It is my own personal copy and I am not going to table it. You can go to the web and find it. It is www.alp.org.au/platform.

Mr WOOD: I shall continue on as the greenhouse gases get worse. Minister, does your department tell explorers before they come to the Territory that you are not approving any uranium mines, therefore, if they come here to explore they are wasting their time.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, if you were listening to the debate in the past few weeks you would have realised that the Territory government cannot approve the opening of a uranium mine in the Territory. That is, clearly, something for the federal government to decide because uranium belongs to the Commonwealth; it does not belong to us. The Commonwealth has the power to overrule the Territory government in opening a uranium mine, but we say we do not support it. That is our policy and we stick with it.

Mr WOOD: Is that true? I thought the media was saying the other day that the Commonwealth advice was it could not overrule the Northern Territory government.

Mr VATSKALIS: Our advice is that they could and ANU academics said the Commonwealth could, the same way they did with euthanasia. I believe that minister Macfarlane is now seeking a legal opinion about the position of the Commonwealth.

Mr WOOD: We will see what happens. Minister, if the policy of your government is not to mine uranium, why do you allow uranium from a South Australian mine to come through the Territory and out through out port? Doesn't that look a bit hypocritical if you are opposed to it for reasons we will never find

out unless we find the three mines policy? Why do you encourage uranium from South Australia to come through the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mining in South Australia is a matter for the South Australian people and their government. It is not for us. Another thing is ...

Mr WOOD: Let them send it out through their own port.

Mr VATSKALIS: There is such a thing called the Australian Constitution whereby you cannot stop communication and transportation between different states and territories of Australia. If they find out it is better for them to export through the Port of Darwin and they comply with all the legislation and regulations put in place by the Territory government, I cannot see how we can stop them.

Mr WOOD: On another subject, minister, the Tennant Creek mines. Was it recently announced that one of those mines might be closing down?

Mr VATSKALIS: Giants Reef announced recently they are closing down their mining operation. They put the Warrego plant in care and maintenance because, according to them, they overestimated the resource at the Giants Reef mine site. However, they negotiated with Bootu Creek for a lot of the work force to be transferred to jobs at Bootu Creek. Also, they announced that, in the next two to three years, they are going to undertake an aggressive exploration regime in the Tennant Creek area to identify other mineral resources they can proceed to mine because they have a lot of tenements in Tennant Creek, and treat them at the Warrego plant for further processing.

Mr WOOD: Could you give us an update on diamond mining in the Northern Territory? I believe there was a large find – was it in the McArthur River area?

Mr VATSKALIS: Merlin Resources announced that they acquired the – sorry, Striker Resources acquired Merlin and they believe that they can process some of the Merlin tailing and acquire some of the diamonds using new techniques. They continue to explore for kimberlite to find diamonds in the area. They believe it is a very prospective area.

Mr WOOD: Is any company commercially producing diamonds from the Northern Territory yet?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not that I am aware of.

Mr WOOD: This may come under Management, so I will be guided by you ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: You know I will always indulge you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is right. I was looking through geophysical surveys and I came across that you had acquired 'new generation airborne gravity data'. You used this over Western Arnhem Land in partnership with the Commonwealth and the private sector. Could you explain what 'gravity data' is and its relationship with mining?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: We are talking about technical scientific data gathering. It is established practice in the industry that geologists use airborne data collected – and we spend a lot of money doing this because it is an industry standard – for interpretation of the surface and below the surface to determine whether it is prospective for minerals. The purpose of it is to determine the prospectivity of the ground. The technical detail of it I cannot explain to you because I am not a geologist. If you would like us to provide you with some information about that, we are only too happy to. The purpose of it is to assist and put in the marketplace information about the geology of the Territory so that geologists in the private sector can make a judgment about whether they think that land is worth acquiring under exploration licence to do further work and to look on the ground for minerals.

Mr WOOD: I am not sure whether you can answer the question, but it says that you have produced a gravity map, which sounds ...

Mr CARROLL: We can give you one, if you like.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can give you lots of them.

Mr WOOD: All right. Good.

Mr CARROLL: Would you like a gravity map of the ...?

Mr WOOD: Absolutely! I will hang it on the wall.

Mr CARROLL: We will arrange for that, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I hope it is not too heavy. Is it a map that recognises that there are certain minerals under the ground, or is it other data?

Mr CARROLL: No, it will not tell you that there is gold there. However, it shows you the geological formations and, if you are an expert, you can tell from those formations whether it is likely to be prospective for the material you are interested in. We certainly will provide you with a map for your wall.

Mr WOOD: I will frame it. I hope this is in the right section, Mr Chairman, it is regarding the Securities Assessment Board. The Minerals and Energy Group recently set up a Securities Assessment Board, which I gather is a fancy name – it sounds like something out of a stock exchange - for a board that helps with the bond. Is that correct? Maybe I should start again. What is the role of the Securities Assessment Board, who is on the board, how will it work, and what is it all about?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Securities Assessment Board is actually the board within the department that will assess the different mining activities when someone is proposing to open a new mine and their risks to the environment, and will set up the appropriate bond - as John Carroll explained before - for the possible rehabilitation. I do not have the names of the board, I think it is within the department.

Mr CARROLL: I can rattle them off for you, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, if you do not mind.

Mr CARROLL: Member for Nelson, the board is composed of me as chair as General Manager Minerals and Energy. Because of the nature of bonds, following the review that was mentioned earlier, it was determined that it is important that there is a degree of independent assessment of securities; that one person was not involved in assessing and determining the securities. Therefore, we have our mining officers review security applications; they come to the board. The membership of the board is me, the Director of Authorisations, which is the area that approves mining management plans, the Director of Compliance, the Director of Petroleum and Mining Titles, the Director of Mining Development - who are all internal DBIRD people - plus the Director of the Office of Environment and Heritage from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

I should add the board has only met three times and only been in existence for a couple of months. The objective of the board is to put up a policy framework for ministerial endorsement, so we have government endorsement of the policy framework against which we assess bonds, and then to individually assess bonds as mining activity occurs, and to recommend for ministerial approval where bonds are outside the level of delegation according to the particular activity.

There are a number of activities that take place across the Territory. Some of them might require only a bond of \$1000, right through to major areas of disturbance or activity that may run into tens of millions of dollars of bonding. It is quite inappropriate for that board to making final assessments on the latter type of assessments. However, because of the number of small things, particularly when the bond is equal to the cost of rehabilitation, the board will be formally ticking off on all those bonds. I should add, again, that bonds are reassessed annually, and they go up and down according to the level of activity over time.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you think the board should have at least one outside representative? That is all internal people from the department there.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. They are from within the department, also from the Office of the Environment and Heritage. You have to remember, some of this information is commercial-in-confidence, so we have to assess what we are doing within the department for the mining company; the fact that the mining company does not want any of this information to be out in the public, some of it might be sensitive. Again, it is not only from within the mining department only. The Office of the Environment and Heritage is part of this board.

Mr WOOD: You could not have someone from the Minerals Council, or someone who could be sworn to secrecy but, basically, have someone from outside? There is no reason that information could not get leaked from within the department as well, but I thought it would balance it to some extent.

Mr VATSKALIS: The department has never leaked information, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: How do you think we get the orders? Sorry. Minister, I understand that this board has started to tell major operators that their environmental securities will be doubled. Is this so; and what figures are we talking about?

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister. There is a case of a major mine that has had bond assessed at a level below full rehabilitation cost. The mine has been advised that we are seeking to get the cost right up to rehabilitation. The reasons for that I will not divulge, because they are commercial-in-confidence, and it is inappropriate for me to talk about operators' positions. However, the latest advice to the company - if we are talking about the same company - was issued earlier this week saying that, for the current mining plan, the current level of bond will stay in place because it is already agreed, and we will be reassessing it at the annual review which occurs in the next few months.

Mr WOOD: Is there any appeal in this process?

Mr CARROLL: No, there is no provision for appeal.

Mr WOOD: Minister, should there be, just out of fairness, an appeal process? We are talking big money here.

Mr VATSKALIS: Do not forget that we have the *Mining Act* review in place at the moment, and we might consider it in the context of the review. However, that comes under mining management.

Mr CARROLL: Perhaps I should clarify the bond process. The bond is not actually necessarily money in the bank; it is often a bank guarantee which the company does not put all the money aside for. What it does is have an arrangement with its bank which has a mortgage over some of its assets. How it does it, I am not entirely sure, and it depends on the circumstances. The cost to the company of a full bond is not the level of the bond, so they are not setting aside tens of millions of dollars and making, if you like, idle money that they cannot access.

I suppose the position the Securities Assessments Board has taken to date has been that the objective of the board is to ensure that the environment of the Territory is protected. To do anything that does not make sure that that happens would be inappropriate, and we will continue to recommend to the minister the level of bond that we think is appropriate for full rehabilitation.

In the particular circumstance that I think you are referring to, there are certain circumstances that would indicate that it would be inappropriate not to have a significant bond in place at this time.

Mr VATSKALIS: As the member for Katherine said - and I fully support her - we do not want to see another Mt Todd disaster with inadequate funds to rectify the problem when the mine finishes.

Mr WOOD: I agree with you. I am not saying it should not be there, but I need to question the process and how you come to work out what you are actually expecting companies to do.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the responsibility of the board; it has nothing to do with the minister. The board consists of people who actually have expertise in mining and the environment. They assess the risk and the mining operation and they put an appropriate bond in place.

Mr CARROLL: If I could just add, minister, in assessing the level of the bond, we start from the position of the company telling us what it will cost. We review that. There have been examples - and I would prefer not to give them - where our assessment has been a little lower than the company's assessment of the cost of rehabilitation. In 99% or thereabouts of the cases, there is really no disagreement between the department and the company about how much rehabilitation would cost. The issue is about how you tie your money up, how much it costs to tie the money up, and what that does on the viability of the operation.

Mr WOOD: Minister, one last question on this area. One of my favourite areas is extractive mining. In the Nelson and Goyder electorates, there is plenty of it. Is the board going to look at securities for these operations? We need the middle of the harbour cleaned up.

Mr VATSKALIS: I suppose if there is a new application for extractive industry, they would have to go through the system that Mr Carroll just outlined. With existing ones?

Mr CARROLL: With the existing ones, they come up for annual review in accordance with the review of bonds. The whole question of how we manage all the extractive stuff is one that is identified as something that needs some work on over the next couple of years. It is probably time to start thinking about some reviews.

Mr WOOD: I would probably say it was time about 15 years ago, minister, nearly as long as your famous policy, but I will be glad to see something happen. The only thing I would say is, if you are going to have a board look at assessing extractive industries, would you have a process that was quick, because many times people have to get access to extract minerals quickly and they would not want to be held up for a long period of time?

Mr CARROLL: Yes, of course, and we are very conscious of the difference between extractives and major mining activity; the difference in the need to respond to the marketplace's needs. That is an important issue: the needs of the operator and the scale of operation. The scale of operation is clearly quite different for extractives to what it is at a major mine site, for example, and it is often short term. However, we are very conscious about the rehabilitation issues there.

We only met with the Extractive Industries Association in the last couple of weeks where we had quite a significant debate about rehabilitation bonds and the length of permits to extract, because the industry has to pay rent on the permit during the life of the permit but, during the rehabilitation process, you are virtually paying dead money while the site is being rehabilitated. It is one of the issues that is going to get picked up in the *Mining Act* review, so there should be something about that later in the *Mining Act* review.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Just one other question on extractive mining, minister. Is the government considering at all banning the removal of topsoil, and requiring people who want topsoil to get it from places like Shoal Bay, where it is manufactured soil, instead of removing what is a valuable natural resource, especially when it comes to rehabilitation where people are removing, say, gravel or even sand?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have to review something like that. I can understand what you are talking about. I have seen many occasions where people who are removing the topsoil extract what they want to extract and rehabilitate using the topsoil like Alcan in Gove. We will take that into consideration.

Mr WOOD: One of the reasons we had problems getting rid of our waste material from some of our dumps was because it had to compete with what is, basically, nearly a free product - that is topsoil - compared to a product that has to be manufactured. In areas like Litchfield Shire which is having problems with green waste, I am sure that more of that green waste would be used if the market was bigger and it did not have to compete with a natural resource that more or less free for the developer.

Minister, talking about Mt Todd, I think I heard you say on the radio one day you thought the cost would be at least \$20m to rehabilitate. I know you are saying now you are not sure of the figure. Would you say it would be substantially bigger than that considering that Woodcutters, I believe, has cost so far \$35m to rehabilitate?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not want to speculate on the amount of money to be spent in Mt Todd. What I would like to point out is we have 12 000 000 m³ of rock that generates acid every time it rains. We have a constant pH of 3. Bring your battery, it will work really well. So we have significant problems in Mt Todd. There is no way you can put back the rock, it is too big. We have to find a way to cut it so it is going to stay dry, it is not going to generate more acid.

The other thing is there are not only the retention ponds and the rock; we have the leached area that has to be rehabilitated to stop leaching acid again from the rock formation. The rain falling on it is generating a significant amount of acid. So, \$20m - and I will not be able to give an accurate price until we have the full report in place and we can start costing the different elements of rehabilitation.

Mr WOOD: Are there any other mines in the same situations in the Territory as Mt Todd?

Mr VATSKALIS: You need to remember that there were a lot of mines that were operating before self-government, so that had nothing to do with any of the governments in the Territory. There were some mines operating after self-government. There are some mines that have significant environmental problems. There are mines that have been abandoned. There are mines that people have just closed and

walked away and left a big hole in the ground. They have to be addressed. I believe we have about 2000 legacy mines ...

Mr WOOD: 2000?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. The department would be a slowly undertaking an audit of these mines. We encourage the mining of these mines and rehabilitation at the same time, as we do on some occasions. For others, we might have to address the issue in the future.

Mr WOOD: Do we have 2000 mines that need cleaning up similar to Mt Todd? It is not just a hole in the ground?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, legacy mines. They are not all polluted; they are actually holes in the ground, yes.

Mr WOOD: Do we have any other mines that have a similar significant pollution or contamination problem like Mt Todd that need rehabilitation?

Mr CARROLL: There are no mines in the same situation as Mt Todd; that is, without an operator on site and someone to manage it. Mt Todd is the only one of that magnitude with that problem. There are a whole range of small abandoned mines that you are not talking about, I do not think. Of the Mt Todd magnitude, Mt Todd is by itself without an operator.

Mr WOOD: Most of the mines we are talking about were gold mines - would that be fair? - just because of the product used for extraction. Basically, Mt Todd is, hopefully ...

Mr CARROLL: The real issue in the Top End is the acid rock drainage. Some of the materials that are used in mining break down – for example, cyanide breaks down when it is exposed to the elements, the sun and air - but it is the longer term problem of water on rock and turning into acid. It is the acid rock drainage that is the long-term problem in the tropics because we have so much water.

Mr WOOD: Has a program of rehabilitation been designed yet for that mine?

Mr CARROLL: For Mt Todd?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: That is the process we are going through at the moment with the Corinne Unger study. The work that is being done is to come up with a plan that achieves rehabilitation outcomes that are effective and that achieve the objectives we are looking for, rather than immediately stepping in and doing some work that might cost a lot of money but does not achieve the objective. It is a slow, scientific steady-as-she-goes process.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regard to Output 1.1, Minerals and Energy? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Primary Industry

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 1.2, Primary Industry. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, thank you. Minister, can you tell the whole of the primary industry sector in the Northern Territory what your government's broad direction is for those industries, and especially what is to unfold in the Douglas Daly over the next three years?

Mr VATSKALIS: Primary industry in the Northern Territory includes horticulture, agriculture and the pastoral industry. It includes fisheries, but in a different output.

One of the biggest industries in the Northern Territory is the pastoral industry, and the government is very supportive of it. We are working closely with the industry to identify new markets, to promote our product in existing markets. We have undertaken trips to different Asian countries, South-East Asia, most of which are our clients. We are supporting the industry by providing grants for people who are coordinating

export. We continue to support the industry by putting in place bio-security measures, preparing ourselves for emergency animal diseases. We provide money for reports and reviews on establishment or re-opening of [inaudible] in the Territory to support the industry.

In the horticulture industry, we have established the Horticultural Partnership Group to promote horticulture in the Territory, interstate and internationally. We support the mango industry to develop the industry and find new markets, including exports to other countries. We also support table grapes in Ti Tree. We are looking at the water re-use project in Alice Springs, which has a direct effect on the horticultural industry.

In respect of the agricultural industry, there is research and development on new varieties of product including sesame in Katherine, and extrapolating the results of the cotton trials in Katherine to apply in other crops in the Territory.

We support the pastoral industry through the Drought Committee, especially in Alice Springs and the West Barkly where they are experiencing a drought. Other areas include supporting the buffalo and camel industries, which are vital for the Territory. We are utilising resources that would otherwise be wasted, such as camel. It is an industry that the Territory has relied upon since the beginning of last century, and we want to bring it up to standard with everywhere else in Australia. That is why we will always work very closely with industry. We develop links with the industry, the latest one of which was the NLIS, and I am pleased to report that the industry has agreed to comply with the NLIS within a two-year time frame.

Mrs MILLER: That is the answer for the Douglas Daly, too?

Mr VATSKALIS: As you are aware, we established a group for the Douglas Daly. Despite the fact that it actually comes under the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, I am happy to touch on the matter as the minister for Primary Industry. We consider the Douglas Daly a very important system for the Northern Territory, and I fully agree with my colleagues that before we proceed to do anything in Douglas Daly, we shall have to be very careful. We do not want to see the repeat of the disasters with regards to rivers and waters down south like the Murray River in South Australia. A cautious approach, you might say, but I would rather spend two years to find out what can be done in the Daly rather than open it for development now and two years later find out I have to close operations down because we destroyed the river.

Mrs MILLER: That is even knowing that the Daly irrigators are known and respected as being amongst the best that there are in the world?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said to you before, there was a lot of debate about the Daly. They were actually the irrigation part of the community reference group, AFANT, the pastoral industries, there are a lot of people there. What came out of the Daly - and everybody agrees with that - was the fact that, yes, there is a history of success and failures, but one of the things we do know for sure is the science behind the water and the water allocation, especially how much water has to be allocated and where and how.

Do we provide licences? What kind of licences? What volume of water to be allocated to each licensee? I have to tell you that I personally took a trip down to Daly a few years back because I was concerned about the Daly. I recall very well that the level of the water in the river was so low that Mr Cordingley was driving his boat about 50 km/h and when we hit the sand bar one of my advisors became superman. He flew into the water about 40 m in front of the boat.

Obviously, there are some problems. We have to be very certain what happens with the water there. I know there is some unequivocal evidence about the water table in Katherine. I recall very well, a few years back, the water was actually coming out of the water table in Katherine. However, I also recall very well, a few years back, there was no water to be seen in the Daly; you could cross the river walking from one bank to the other. We are not very certain about it and it is very wise to spend money and time for two years to explore what happens in the Douglas Daly region before we actually make a decision on how to proceed with development of the region.

Mrs MILLER: I do not disagree with you on that score ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am very glad about that.

Mrs MILLER: ... but I do disagree with you in putting the moratorium on the pastoralists that are already there. I strongly disagree because it is not allowing those people to develop. There is no broad

scale development plan in the Daly at all so, what it has done is impinging on those people living there at the moment. I agree, yes, there has to be research. I fully support that and I think all of the industries do. However, what I do not agree with is the moratorium that is put on the people who are already there.

As I said, there is no large scale planning of clearing by any of those owners in the foreseeable future. Despite all the hype about the river sedimentation in the Daly - and that is being placed on landowners - and even though your boat driver became superman, do you know that that river sedimentation actually originates in the upper reaches of the Katherine River system? It does not originate there, so it is nothing to do with that primary industry activity in the Daly.

Mr VATSKALIS: First of all, I agree with you, and I am glad you agree with me that we are going to the research.

The biggest clearing in this area was undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s at Tipperary. When that was cleared, nothing was planted. All the top soil, for which the member for Nelson was very concerned, finished in the Daly. I have flown over the Tipperary. The new operators are very professional; they are doing a really good job. However, they were equally surprised that somebody would clear hundreds of thousands of kilometres and do nothing with it, to such a degree that now we have seen secondary growth at actually the same height as the original growth of trees in the Tipperary.

The other thing is the sedimentation. Yes, I agree with you. I was in the Daly when I saw an island in the middle of the river that had plants growing on it. It disappeared in the next Wet when the flood came through. I would like to know your sources about the sedimentation that originates in the upper reaches of the Katherine River. One of the things we cannot really find out yet - and that is one of the things we have to examine - is where this sediment is coming from, where it arrived from, because there has to be some detailed knowledge of the kind of material deposited in the Daly, and to be analysed in other areas. There are conflicting views. You say it comes from the upper Katherine River; there are other locals who say it is actually the banks of the river collapsing because of the boats coming down the river at high speed, and their wake is undermining the banks. Other people say it comes from the rain - we have to find out what is happening in the Daly. It is too precious to a lot of people to actually make a mistake in that river.

Mrs MILLER: I agree with you to that point. However, I still say that the landowners are the ones who are paying the price from waiting for this decision to be made.

Mr VATSKALIS: People who already have a licence to clear are not affected. What we said was no new clearing or new development in the Daly for two years until we get the science right. When we get the science right, then we will be able to do the proper water allocation to property development, and people will be happier than actually having to go back two or three years to: 'Sorry, guys, we made a mistake, we will cut the licence now to take a further 10% of what you had before'.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, one of the areas of sedimentation that I am referring to as a perfect example of being in the upper system of the Katherine River system is the Ferguson River. When we have had extensive flooding in the Ferguson River in the last seven or eight years it has totally transformed the sedimentation deposits that are even at the Ferguson bridge. It is totally transformed and there is no primary industry development in the upper catchment above that. That is a perfect example of how things can change with heavy rainfall.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. This is exactly the way to find out because, from one year to another, we have such a change of conditions. We have to calculate and examine this change of conditions and find out how we might be able to, or can, control them. Let us spend two years studying all these mechanisms - all this natural phenomena - before we make a decision. It is reasonable to ask people to wait for 720 days or 750 days rather than finish now.

Mrs MILLER: If it is only 750 days, that might not be too unreasonable. However, some of those developers are not very happy people. Some of those landowners are not very happy.

Another reason I am deeply concerned about the Daly is, because of the moratoriums that have been placed on the Daly, it is not encouraging for development at all in the Territory. People are thinking that government is having far too much say in what happens in that area, where we have \$24m worth of produce coming from that area alone. These people are very astute. The landowners who are there are very astute people and respect the soil.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. However, at the same time, I want to remind you that a lot of people from down south – South Australia and New South Wales – are totally disappointed with a lack of action from their governments to prevent a disaster that has happened now in the Murray and other rivers. As I said before, we have put a two-year moratorium to do the science, to do the examination. We are prepared to do that. I believe it is wiser to do that now, rather than actually leave it open slather for everybody and, in two years time, say: 'I am sorry guys, we made a mistake'.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, could you really reassure the people of the Daly that it will definitely only be two years? The moratorium will not go on, and on, and on?

Mr VATSKALIS: We said before we want to do the examination and we want to check the science of the whole region. Okay? Let us just do that. The community will be involved; we have already involved the community. We are not going to keep secrets from the community; they are going to be involved.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, I have some more questions later on it, anyway. We could probably stay on the Daly for the whole three hours, I would say. During the election campaign – and, if I remember correctly, this was the day before the last moratorium was placed in the Daly - the Chief Minister announced that \$3.3m would be expended to examine the Douglas Daly. Minister, are you able to tell me where this \$3.3m is going to come from? Is it additional money for research in the Daly, or is it going to be taken from departmental buckets?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, that question should be asked of the Chief Minister or the minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. It does not come under the Primary Industry portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: It is not going to come out of any departments to do with primary industries?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have anything in my budget to say that I am going to pay for assessing the Daly. This is the Chief Minister's responsibility, or the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

Mrs MILLER: As long as it is not going to come out of your bucket. Is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have not seen anything to say otherwise.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. In the 2005-06 Budget, minister, at page 139, Primary Industry outputs in 2004-05 were estimated at \$35.59m. The budget for 2005-06 is \$34.525 and this is a variation of over \$1m, nearly \$2m. Given that your government continually boasts about how you support primary industries, how can you explain this drop in budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: Let me take us a step further back. In the 2004-05 Budget, there was \$34.1m. The revised estimate for the 2004-05 Budget was \$35.5m and the 2005-06 Budget, as you said, is \$34.5m. The reason for the increase from the original budget 2004-05 to the revised estimate was the additional funding that was given by the Commonwealth for the grapevine leaf rust survey and other programs. This money has now ceased. For example, the \$430 000 for the grapevine leaf rust survey is not there anymore. The \$166 000 of Australian Quarantine Inspection Services' rent and \$146 000 for Commonwealth-funded tuberculosis freedom assurance program - that was a Commonwealth program - are the main programs of a number of programs that were funded by the Commonwealth and they are not funded anymore. It was not a reduction to the budget as such.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Thank you. Listening to you speak a moment ago, just reminded me of something else that I needed to inquire of you. What research has your department done towards reopening the Katherine meatworks?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department paid a consultant to examine the situation with the Katherine abattoirs, and the consultant came back and advised that, yes, they can keep open but they need about 8000 cattle minimum a year to survive.

Mrs MILLER: How many?

Mr VATSKALIS: 8000 cattle ...

Mrs MILLER: 8000.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... a year to survive, and the best idea would be a multi-species abattoir rather than a single species abattoir. The problem at the moment is the high price that the Northern Territory beef commands in the South-East Asian markets. All of the beef is exported to South-East Asia or to other states for fattening and re-exporting. Nobody has put his hand out to provide 8000 cattle. A number of people are getting better money - up to \$1.90 per kilo of live weight - when they are exporting overseas or interstate, compared to something like the \$1.20, \$1.30 or \$1.40 the abattoir will give them.

It is a matter of economics and, as long as the export market is buoyant, and Indonesians, Malaysians and Filipinos and anybody else is prepared to pay \$1.90 for Northern Territory cattle, nothing is going to happen. However, I might add, it is very relative. The Alice Springs abattoir is nearly open. Mr Gary Dann will open it. He is killing about 10 camels and 10 cattle per week, and sells the meat in a specialised market with good results. Again, it is a small abattoir. I had discussion with the Teys Brothers about reopening of their abattoir but, as they said to me, it comes down to economics. If they do not have the number of cattle going through every year, it is not economic to operate the abattoirs.

Mrs MILLER: Still on that meatworks – when the consultants which – yes, I will ask in a moment who they were.

Mr VATSKALIS: McKinna.

Mrs MILLER: When the consultants were conferring, did they only go to the major beef providers or did they go to all of those station properties that do not export and that would be able to make a tally up of 8000 head a year?

Mr BURGESS: I will ask Rod Gobbey to assist as well. McKinna, who did the study, at the time canvassed a wide range of different beef producers when he came up with his report. In addition to that, we separately had continuing discussions with the Teys Brothers who own the abattoir. I have met with them a number of times and had been in personal contact with their managers. The issue that we have to overcome is the reliability of the 8000 to 10 000 head per head that they would need to put through that facility to make it viable for re-opening.

One of the more strategic issues that we have been addressing with the Cattlemen's Association as well is what risk management strategies they would like to have in place should the Australian dollar change its value, or should some other circumstances impede their ability to sell cattle overseas.

Coming out of that, we have a commercial analyst working inside the department at the moment looking at the commercial background to what it would take to open an abattoir of a certain size in the Territory, or to re-open abattoirs; so there is a blank sheet analysis so the industry can also think about what it might want to do and what it might want to discuss with its members as risk management strategies going forward.

It is not something that the department can force on a facility owner, but the industry would need to take that into account when it is mapping its future, and think about the number of markets it can sell into and in what form, and whether that is on legs or in boxes.

Mrs MILLER: The 8000 head that you are referring to, is that cattle as well as, or is that 8000 head all together that would have to go through that abattoir to make it viable?

Mr VATSKALIS: A base load of 4000 to 8000 cattle per annum would need to be processed through an export accredited slaughter and boning facility to achieve break even. Depending on the Australian dollar and the market and everything else, you need 8000 cattle to break even; so you have to kill more to make a profit.

The other thing is if there is an abattoir killing the type of cattle in the northern part of the Northern Territory, that would only be for hamburger meat, because the Brahman cattle is not the kind of meat that the domestic consumer prefers. In contrast, a lot of the Central Australian cattle go to the southern states because they produce the breeds that the Australian consumer wants. That is a big difference in the price and the viability of the abattoir. McKinna said that, overall, probably a mini-multi-species abattoir would be most appropriate for the Territory and would make money where others have failed.

The big problem we have is the money that we take now from exporting cattle is well above what an abattoir would offer for an animal to be killed in Australia.

Mrs MILLER: Is the department going to keep this on the backburner to keep an eye ...

Mr VATSKALIS: All the time.

Mrs MILLER: All the time?

Mr VATSKALIS: All the time. We would love to have a multi-species abattoir. Export of live camels has now been restricted. We would like to be able to kill camels and buffalo. We would like to be able to kill buffalo in Australia and export it in boxes, either overseas or domestically.

I have been in regular contact with Teys Brothers. I encourage them strongly to keep the abattoir viable as long as possible. Because things might change, we have to have something to fall back on if there is another Asian economy meltdown.

Mrs MILLER: For our industry in Katherine, I hope there is.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not think that the industry would agree with that.

Mrs MILLER: No, I am well aware of that. So as long as it is kept on the backburner and you just keep an eye on that, yes.

Minister, another blow to the pastoral area this year is that the Katherine Research Station has had a reduction in their budget of some \$300 000, according to the budget papers. This research farm carries out some vital research for the development of primary industry in the Top End and has some excellent results from their valuable research. What aspect of research do you think that Katherine Research Station is not worthy of funding?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Rod to respond to that.

Mr GOBBEY: Specifically in relation to the Katherine Research Station, the 2004-05 staffing numbers are specific to those people engaged to support the research station, separate from those people who find it as their administrative home or for other purposes. Katherine has a 5.5 ceiling in 2004-05, and there is a budget to support those staff of \$476 000. The 2005-06 budget is a reduction of 0.5 of an FTE. That, in part, is due to the reallocation of some of it, which would include considering, in the longer term, the research work that is conducted in Katherine and those considerations, and would include the work in relation to the cotton trials which will cease later in the year.

Mrs MILLER: Is that the only research that is going to finish at Katherine Research Station?

Mr GOBBEY: Research priorities change all the time. I do not have the specific research program for Katherine with me today. As an overall picture, if you like, of the snapshot of what is happening at Katherine Research Station, it is, indeed, the base for the primary industry group at Katherine and also services some of those extension programs for Katherine district and the VRD. The cattle production research program will be in relation to cross-breeding work. There will be some irrigation crop production research done, concentrating on cotton until the conclusion of that project. There will be some work done on rotational crops. There will be work done in relation to pastures, (inaudible) and seed production. There is some ongoing work with sesame crop production, including varietal breeding and selection programs. We do some important work from a fire security perspective in the national arbovirus monitoring program, and there is also some tropical horticulture work done on the station.

Mrs MILLER: That is Katherine?

Mr GOBBEY: That is in relation to Katherine, yes.

Mrs MILLER: I have a very similar question for the Douglas Daly, because they have had a reduction of \$250 000 in their budget as well. What research has ceased there?

Mr GOBBEY: The data I have for the coming year in relation to the Douglas Daly is, in fact, the staffing numbers remain the same. There is a modest reduction in the research input directly, and that is in relation to \$30 000. That could be a variation at the program level. It is not a significant amount of money in the context of the overall staff numbers.

Mrs MILLER: No, that is not a significant amount. I do not have that book with me, but I had it at considerably more than that. I will get back to the minister on that, because the answer that I have – I do not have the comparisons here; the comparisons from last year and the input.

Mr BURGESS: If I may? The figures you quoted, so that we are able to respond to them. It would be good if you were able to point to which part of the budget papers they are in.

Mrs MILLER: They are in the *Regional Highlights*, and I compared them with last year's *Regional Highlights*.

Mr BURGESS: That might take us some time to look at. Certainly, in the *Regional Highlights*, it may well have included programs that were of an ongoing nature – externally funded that have now ceased. There is a whole range of explanations for those.

Mrs MILLER: That is why I will seek those explanations from you at a later time, rather than hold this up.

On the subject of research at Katherine, what have the trials for cotton so far yielded?

Mr VATSKALIS: October 2005 will see the completion of the cotton research trials at Katherine. We have already 60 ha of trials this year in Katherine. We have studied insect pest dynamics; irrigation; drains; conservation; nutrients; fertilizer; pesticides; herbicides; spraying regime, rotation crops and farming systems. All this information is not specific to one particular crop; we can extrapolate to other crops that can be utilised in the area. If tomorrow we plant peanuts, melons, sesame; all the information we have learned from the cotton trials can be extrapolated to be utilised in other areas.

Mrs MILLER: What is the result of the trials of growing cotton in Katherine at the research station?

Mr VATSKALIS: The information that I have is actually that yes, cotton grows in Katherine, but it is not going to be something that is going to bring significant wealth to the Territory. It is marginal. But ...

Mr WOOD: Come on!

Mrs MILLER: Does this government ...

Mr WOOD: That is not what George Baker says, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson!

Mr WOOD: Yes, I know. I know. There are times ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, please!

Mrs MILLER: Why do you, therefore, say that you would ban cotton in the Northern Territory, if you know that it is not going to be a major crop; it is only going to be a rotational crop? Why are you banning it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because we do not believe that cotton is a crop that is actually going to benefit the Territory; it is not going to be the crop that is actually going to make Territorians rich. On the other hand, you have problems with people who are concerned about the possibility of genetically modified cotton being grown in the region. International research has shown that genetically modified crops - despite what has been said by some of the companies that are promoting it - still requires extensive irrigation and spraying and, as time goes by, it requires more and more spraying. Then you find out that, in some areas, it is actually genetically modified cotton. It is not as good as the locally produced cotton, such as in Indonesia. Cotton in the Territory ...

Mr WOOD: Why would you say that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson! You will get your chance!

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I can provide you with the information. The government sticks by its decision that no cotton will grow commercially in the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: While I do not think it is going to be a major crop in the Territory, do you not think that horticulturalists should have the right to be able to decide whether they want to use it as a rotational crop?

Mr VATSKALIS: That means that they can use it, but they have to make sure that they have adequate water supply to water it. That also means they have to support the cotton with pesticides and the combination of significant water for irrigating cotton and also utilising pest control methods are not suitable, are very dangerous.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you would be very well aware that the research carried out at Katherine has very pleasing results with drip irrigation for cotton.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: And you still say that you would not support it?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. We can use the drip irrigation for other crops, and I cannot see the reason why we cannot use other crops.

Mrs MILLER: I will not go further with the cotton, because I know that the member for Nelson is just about jumping out of his skin. I will leave the cotton to him. I certainly do not understand the rationale of the government in banning cotton. I have to say that the Country Liberal Party would not support the growing of cotton in the Douglas Daly basin, but there are areas in the Northern Territory where it could be grown where it would have no effect on the water supplies at all.

Mr VATSKALIS: If it is not going to have any effect on water supplies, why does the CLP not support cotton in the Daly? There is plenty of water in the Daly. If cotton is not going to have any effect on the water supply, the CLP then should support growing cotton at the Daly.

Mrs MILLER: We said we would not grow it in the Daly ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Why, if it is not going to have any effect on the water supply?

Mrs MILLER: ... because we are not 100% sure of the quantity of the water that is there, so we would grow it - and the soil is not suitable, minister, but it is on the black plains of the Victoria River.

Mr VATSKALIS: Just a few minutes ago, you were arguing I should allow development at Daly because there is no problem with the water.

Mr KNIGHT: You would grow cotton on the Vic River?

Mrs MILLER: No, we are not growing the cotton on the Vic River.

Mr KNIGHT: Where are you going to grow it?

Mrs MILLER: I will speak to you later, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: I was going to ask the same question ...

Mrs MILLER: I am not growing it anywhere, member for Daly!

Mr KNIGHT: The CLP supported it somewhere in the Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: I was going to ask the same question because, at the moment, people say cotton can grow in the Territory, but nobody has come to us to say that you can grow cotton safely in that particular area.

Mrs MILLER: But you have that you are banning it!

Mr VATSKALIS: Exactly, because we are concerned about cotton. We do not believe that you can grow cotton successfully in the Territory. You have trials in Katherine, but having those trials in Katherine does not prove that it will actually grow anywhere in the Territory, like Vic River, or Pepperminati or anywhere else.

We have problems with cotton, and it will be recorded. I am not agreeing as such, but I can read some of the scientific evidence and information about growing cotton, especially genetically modified cotton, and some of the problems that actually presents.

Mr Wood interjecting.

Mrs MILLER: All right. While you are getting yourself calm, member for Nelson, I will go on with something else so that you can have something to say there.

Minister, integrated support for the pastoral industry decreased by \$20 000 in the 2005-06 budget: why is that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Integrated support in what sense?

Mrs MILLER: I am asking you. It is in the performance outcomes in your outputs. Your performance measures.

Mr GOBBEY: I would need more specific information in which to respond.

Mrs MILLER: All right. I will leave that one and come back to that, because it is in your performance outputs.

Minister, in continuing with a lot of reductions in the budget for primary industries, water and weed management has been reduced in this budget by \$410 000. Given that the Territory has serious problems with a variety of weeds including gamba and *Noogoora burr*, and your government has stated many times that you are concerned about water management, why have you cut the budget in this area by \$410 000?

Mr VATSKALIS: Water and weeds comes under the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. It does not come under my portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, so we will not grow the weeds on that bit of pastoral property? All right.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, weed and water control comes under a different portfolio. It is not in my budget.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, not a problem. Minister, your government established the Daly Region Community Reference Group in 2003. How many people were on this group and who were they?

Mr VATSKALIS: That was not established under the primary industry portfolio; it was established under the Infrastructure, Planning and Environment portfolio. Dr Burns would be the most appropriate person to answer that question.

Mrs MILLER: I will ask him that, I certainly will. One of your glossy brochures released after the budget stated that \$408 000 has been allocated to expand indigenous pastoral and horticultural enterprises on indigenous owned land, including employment opportunities throughout the Territory. Minister, would you please detail what these pastoral and horticultural enterprises are? Where they are located and how much is being allocated to each one?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, I am very pleased you asked this question because I always said that mining, pastoral industry and fisheries would be key industries that indigenous people can have employment or can actually develop their own opportunities. I will ask Rod to give you detail answer on that particular area.

Mr GOBBEY: Thank you, minister. I may not be able to give you absolutely all of the detail that you are seeking but I can give you somewhat of an overview of both the pastoral and horticulture programs in this area.

I will deal with the pastoral program first, if I may. The key point and purpose of this initiative is to integrate the indigenous participation in the pastoral industry by increasing the number of cattle on indigenous country and encouraging Aboriginal people in the pastoral work force. This will require long-term support and include close cooperation and teamwork with the relevant land councils. The programs include a number of leases of indigenous country that have a combined potential capacity of 35 000 head of cattle, providing 10 seasonal jobs and another 20 contract fencing positions.

An apprenticeship scheme has been developed in partnership with industry and has seen 13 indigenous trainees from Elliott and Tennant Creek regions participating in training facilitated by DBIRD, the NT Rural College of CDU and the Juno Horse Centre. The majority of these trainees are now placed in pastoral enterprises, in award jobs facilitated by DBIRD, including three months direct mentoring by ex-stockman of indigenous descent.

A drought management strategy to manage potential animal welfare issues in cattle and feral animals has been implemented in the Central Australian regions as part of this program. Additional support to the program has been made through the appointment of a new staff member for advice, mentoring and support, but also through the development of the indigenous trainee stock inspector.

There are a number of parties that contribute to this, include DBIRD and some other funding bodies. Through the coming year, 2005-06, we envisage that we further leases with the potential of 4000 head of cattle coming into production numbers, and up to eight positions have been created to be involved in fencing of pastoral leases on indigenous land. We envisage continuation of support and mentoring to current indigenous enterprises including an indigenous cattleman's workshop to be held at Alice Springs and Katherine at some time in this financial year.

A part-time officer has been employed under the Indigenous Business Industry Services to implement the Drought Management Strategy, so there are some good results and some results to be seen in the future in this program.

Mr VATSKALIS: It may add to that some other opportunities include:

- a joint venture between Ali Curung Community Centre Farm and Jabiru Tropical Orchard to produce 200 ha of mangoes in Central Australia. They are currently in the final stages of the agreement;
- providing technical support for community school garden projects;
- appoint four indigenous trainees in the table grape industry in Central Australia;
- new leases of indigenous country with combined carrying capacity of 34 000 head of cattle, providing 10 seasonal jobs and over 20 contract fencing positions, as Rod said;
- an apprentice scheme has seen 18 indigenous trainees from the Elliott and Tennant Creek regions participating in training facilitated by DBIRD, the NT Rural College and Juno Horse Centre;
- with regard to fisheries, mud crab farming will be trialled in Maningrida, Kulaluk and Howard Island; and
- aquaculture initiatives will include Kulaluk, Maningrida, Howard Island, South Goulburn, Groote Eylandt, Adelaide River, Wooliana, Croker Island and Nhulunbuy. Elcho Island and Nhulunbuy expressed interest in obtaining coastal line fishing licences, and we intend to work with them very closely.

We also have some initiatives in mining. I know we passed mining, but we work very closely with the mining industry through IMEC. Quite a number of indigenous people work with Newmont, GEMCO, Alcan as rehabilitation people, labourers, and plant operators. At one stage, 20% of Newmont's work force were indigenous people. Alcan has a very big project to train indigenous people through YNOTS to operate machinery, and hire these people to work at the mine.

The department works actively with indigenous people to provide job opportunities.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, most of these trainees are on the job?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we have to start people on the job because quite a few of them have not had much prior experience. Some of them are very quick to learn. I was very impressed when I visited Alice Springs recently with the four apprentices in the grape area in Ti Tree. They were very keen to learn. Some of them did not last long – did not like the hard life – but the others were very keen to go back to try.

What they learnt there was to establish gardens at their communities, and I have some great photos showing them establishing the garden. At that stage, the garden was ready to produce vegetables.

Mrs MILLER: While we are talking about the trainees, do you know, offhand, how many are at the NT Rural College?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot give you the number offhand. We can find out and provide it to you later if you want it.

Mrs MILLER: That would be interesting to know.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy with that.

Question on Notice

Mrs MILLER: How many indigenous trainees are placed at the Northern Territory Rural College at Katherine?

Mr CARROLL: Are they trainees or apprentices?

Mrs MILLER: Trainees - both the same, according to Mr Stirling. Trainees and apprentices are exactly the same, according to Mr Stirling.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you accept that question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Then I allocate that question No 8.3.

Mrs MILLER: That is all I have on that output, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr KNIGHT: I have a question. I was glad to hear those comments in the last output about uranium and cotton. The point is lost on urban-based and rural-based members but not lost on bush members that there is environmental impact and danger. It is all this not-in-my-back-yard stuff; it is in the cities and it does not matter. We live in the cities and it is out bush, it does not matter.

Mr WOOD: Some of us live in the bush.

Mr KNIGHT: Anyway, I will move on. In the VRD, which is part of my electorate again, we have an influx of budgies that have come up from the Centre. Obviously, things are difficult in the Centre for the Centralian pastoralists.

Mr VATSKALIS: Very tough for budgies.

Mr KNIGHT: Yes, a lot of people in those communities have never seen them before. Obviously, things are a bit difficult in the Centre. What is the government doing for Centralian pastoralists and where that appears in the budget? Also, the federal government announced a drought relief package for exceptional circumstances. I was wondering how that is going to benefit these Territorians.

Mr VATSKALIS: It has been tough in the Centre; they have not seen much rain. It is the same with the western Barkly.

In October 2004, the Northern Territory government approved a drought preparedness recovery policy statement, including continuation of the Northern Territory drought assistance arrangements. A steering committee had been formed to provide advice and recommendations on all matters relating to local drought assistance arrangements, and participated in the preparation of an application to the Commonwealth in times of severe drought – the exceptional circumstances drought. In the past, the Northern Territory government applied twice under the exceptional circumstances drought arrangement with the Commonwealth, and it was knocked back - both times. We did not get any.

We have received 50 applications. They were supposed to be in our office by 30 May. We gave them a bit of leeway, and we accepted 50 late applications for inspection declaration. The inspectors have now inspected these properties. They have come back and have provided a report to the CEO, who is going to assess and evaluate these reports, and will make a determination. Then we will help the pastoralists to apply for exceptional circumstances to the Commonwealth government. The CEO is going to assess these for drought-affected properties and, if these properties are declared drought-affected, then they can access some of the tax benefits the Commonwealth has in place. Then, the government has to make a decision as to what kind of support we will provide to these pastoralists.

As the year before, applications for declaration of exceptional circumstances drought in southern Australia were unsuccessful in 1994 and 1996. Things are changing slowly in the Commonwealth. We are going to put in another application and the department is going to help the Cattlemen's Association and the cattlemen to prepare their application. Hopefully, this time we will be successful. We understand it is pretty tough. The rains we have had recently will probably provide some relief, but there are some people who have not had rain for nearly 16 months in the areas.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions in this output?

Mr WOOD: I thought you might have missed me there, Mr Chairman. I would like to make a comment about the broad-brush statements about whether you are urban or rural ...

Mr KNIGHT: Not in my backyard.

Mr WOOD: No. At least I have the advantage of being Independent. I do not have to blindly follow a party policy. My job is really not to say so much whether it is a good idea. It is to ask the minister whether the decisions he makes are based on science, or just based on some idea that the party says is a good idea, and will not do it. That is why I am part of the Estimates Committee.

Minister, what I would like to ask you is in regard to cropping. If someone is growing crops on the Daly, what do you think would be the major risk to the Daly from cropping?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not a simple question.

Mr WOOD: I think it is.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is not, because cropping entails where, how, when, what kind of crops. Where do you want me to start? If I look as an environmental scientist and at the past history of clearing and developing crops in areas around the world, I can find some areas that have done very well, because they had a lot of environmental and government regulatory restraints. You would find some other ones that have done very badly because governments either dropped the ball or even encourage them in what they did. I will give you some examples. If you go to Europe, you will find out that they currently operate some areas quite effectively. Actually, Europe now pays people to abandon farming and to bring land back to the original condition. If you go to the old Soviet Union, and you will the Aral Lake has disappeared because water was diverted for irrigation of extensive cotton growth in some of the areas where it should never have been growing.

To say, well, somebody grows a crop in the Daly; is this person going to grow crops in an area which is already cleared, or has been cleared in the past? Is this person going to clear an area in the Daly? Is this crop going to be rain fed, or is it going to be irrigated? If it is going to be irrigated, how much water has to be taken from where? It is not just a simple answer. It is an answer that has too many elements, too many levels, that have to be examined before you give an answer.

Mr WOOD: You have the land cleared already, and you want to grow a crop on the Daly. What are the risks to the environment that that crop could have?

Mr VATSKALIS: First of all, is the kind of crop you grow going to be rain fed or requires irrigation? If it requires irrigation ...

Mr WOOD: Takes irrigation.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, how are you going to irrigate it? Mangoes are grown in the Daly. Mangoes consume a lot of water. You can grow other crops ...

Mr WOOD: What about maize?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... like hay that actually is rain fed and does not require irrigation from water that you have to draw from either underground or the river.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, we are going to run out of time. I can see this happening. I know you are trying to get to a point and are trying to lead the minister to a certain place, but we are here to interrogate the budget. Could you cut to the chase and ask your question, and then we can probably get a straighter answer.

Mr WOOD: I generally do cut to the chase. However, the minister made some statements regarding cotton, and I believe they are misleading. The issue really should be about cropping. The dangers of cropping on the Daly River are soil erosion, nutrient run-off, pesticides and herbicides. On the Daly River, you allow maize, peanuts, watermelons, mangoes, tomatoes, and I think bananas and probably some other minor crops to be grown. All that is grown and, for some reason, you do not allow cotton.

Yet, cotton, as shown in the trials, uses 4.5 megalitres (ML) to 5.5 ML per hectare of water; mangoes use 5 ML to 6 ML; peanuts use 6 ML; maize uses 6 ML to 7 ML. Crops such as peanuts, mangoes and melons are sprayed at least as many times as cotton; they also use fungicide which cotton does not.

Cotton uses sub-surface irrigation, no till cultivation, very few sprays - and I have to say minister, read this and you will see why - integrated pest management using a cash crop to avoid resistance, and the only two sprays it uses are Frontline and Gemstar. One is for the control of fleas on dogs, would you believe, which you probably use at home for your own dog, and Gemstar is a naturally occurring virus used in organic farming.

I do not really care whether the government wants to say: 'Do not grow cotton'. It is my job to at least ask if you pick on cotton, then why do you not pick on mangoes, peanuts, melons and maize? They have probably more potential to damage the environment on the Daly than cotton which, under your own trials has been proved - as your own people have said - that there would be no ecological agronomic management or scientific reasons why it should be banned. That is from your own research.

All I am saying is, if cotton was to be grown, as you said, in Europe where it dried up a lake, then I totally agree with you. If it was to destroy rivers as it has done in some parts of Australia, I absolutely agree with you. However, we had trials which have been receiving good money which you now say have to stop, which have shown, using best practice, will be safer than the crops that you are allowing to still be grown on the Daly. That is why I have trouble understanding the sense behind the government's policy.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, despite the fact that this is the Estimates Committee to interrogate the budget, are you trying now to interrogate the government about cotton?

Mr WOOD: No, cropping.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have to remind you that during a debate in parliament a few months ago - and it is in *Hansard* - I provided enough evidence to you and the House about cotton. We have a different opinion about cotton: you believe everything is great, I do not ...

Mr WOOD: No, I am just saying it is a crop.

Mr VATSKALIS: You believe cotton can be cultivated with minimum effect on the environment; I do not. I will refer you to *Hansard*. Have a look; in that I referred to information and studies. I stated the studies clearly, and the name of people who wrote them and where they were done, and that proves exactly the opposite of what you say. Let us continue to interrogate the budget, and less discussion about cotton.

Mr WOOD: I am interrogating because you will not allow any more research.

Mr VATSKALIS: Fine.

Mr WOOD: How do you know what you are saying is correct if you have stopped the research?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because we have said it has been done everywhere in the world ...

Mr WOOD: Can you clearly state ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, wait!

Mr WOOD: ... we have spent money on these trials ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, the minister has given his answer to a very long statement where I had trouble discerning exactly what the question was. The minister has replied and said it is all on the *Hansard* record that took place in another parliamentary debate.

I would just like to draw your attention to the fact that we have been on this one point for about eight minutes and the shadow minister wishes for other questions in other areas ...

Mr WOOD: With all due respect, I have sat here nearly all of Estimates Committee and I can say there are subjects here that we probably spent an hour-and-a-quarter on. I have spent eight minutes on what I think is an important issue. I would just ask the minister one more question.

Are you saying to Colin Martin and Steven Yates and all the people who worked on that research in Katherine Research Station and the CSIRO - people who do not generally want to destroy any environment, because I have met them - that this research is faulty; this research is not true? This is your department. You are not supporting your department's research? You have spent a lot of money on this research, or you received a lot of money on this research. You are saying this is flawed?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I know you are a great advocate for the cotton industry ...

Mr WOOD: No. I am asking; I want the logic behind cropping.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, you asked a question and I am answering. I said before we had this debate in parliament a few months ago on exactly the same point ...

Mr WOOD: Well, tell me: is it flawed?

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on. The government has made a decision that says no cotton will be grown commercially in the Territory. The CLP, the opposition, has made the same statement: no cotton will grow commercially in the Daly region, for their own reasons. In this area we agree.

You are the only one who supports cotton growing. I am also informed that they were actually thinking of starting a cotton industry in other states in Australia but the studies said that cotton growing in these areas are marginal. The department did a trial; the trial was successful, yes. It was a controlled trial in a controlled environment. In that trial they found some results which were great, which could be extrapolated to other crops. We said we are not going to grow cotton because we are concerned about cotton. Full stop.

Mr WOOD: I will make one comment, minister. The viability of whether it can be grown here would be a commercial decision, not your decision, of any crop. You might grow left-handed bananas down at Katherine for all I know and, if someone does not want to grow them because they are not viable, that is their decision. However, you have had research done and, minister, you have said on record today that you believe it is not commercial. That will be a decision from the extrapolation of whether it could be commercial based on your own figures here in the research. It at least needs to be put on record that this document said:

A viable cotton industry of only 7000 ha ...

100 m by 700 m:

... would have a major contribution to the economy of the NT by creating 44 full-time jobs on farms and a similar number in direct support industries; that is, gins. The industry would spend 80% of gross income on input, 75% of which would be purchased locally.

That is what it says. It will only happen if someone thinks it is viable to come to the Northern Territory. Where it is grown, to me, at the present time, is irrelevant. The argument is that this debate should be about cropping - cropping systems. If you grow 7000 ha of maize, minister, that ruins the Daly River and you can still sit there and say: 'We won't ban maize', and you will ban 7000 ha of cotton which is grown to the best sustainable, environmentally sensitive standards, it would seem to me hypocritical of the government. You would not want to ruin the Daly by growing peanuts and maize, would you, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well 7000 ha is 7 km by 10 km. The other thing, of course, is if it was for commercial reasons as you say - I have people coming to my office proposing new mango plantations for a new variety of mangoes; I have people coming into my office talking about grapes. I have not had anybody in my office asking for cotton. If people thought it was going to be such a magnificent crop in the Territory, where are the people coming to my office proposing to start planting cotton?

Mr WOOD: Exactly what I am arguing about.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is my argument. We should stop the discussion here for the simple reason – obviously, some people think: ‘Yes, cotton might be a good idea but it is not commercially profitable in the Territory. Why should we bother?’ The other thing is – and we should stop here because, again, I stress it is to interrogate the budget, not cotton or mangoes or any other thing. Let us go into the budget and talk about the budget and we can have another debate about cotton in parliament. We have plenty of time in parliament and we can talk about cotton then.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions in regard to this particular output?

Mr WOOD: All right. Okay. I will just say finally, minister, the issue is about cropping.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you – peanut cropping.

Mr WOOD: Okay. I will have to ask you that other question again, of course. How much money did we receive from those trials? I missed the answer.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: One of the major inputs was from the Cotton CRC. They contributed \$250 000 in the financial year 2004-05 and, for the financial year 2005-06, they will contribute \$146 000.

Mr WOOD: Did some of that money go into mango research?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not aware of that. I understand that we contributed about \$250 000 in-kind support. We will contribute in 2005-06, but I am not aware whether some of it went to mango research.

Mr WOOD: I thought it was part of the agreement that some of that money be invested into other research.

Mr GOBBEY: I am not aware of that level of detail in the agreement.

Mr WOOD: Rambutans. A complaint I have had from rambutan growers is that it has been very difficult to get government to support the introduction of new varieties from overseas into the Territory. Has the government done anything as regards the introduction of new rambutan varieties?

Mr VATSKALIS: I met with people from the industry and I suggested that we should work together to identify a new variety into our country. I will be prepared to talk at ministerial level with that particular government or minister about the introduction of new varieties of rambutan. You should be aware that a lot of the Asian countries have tropical fruits and they are very reluctant to provide varieties outside their country because they want to corner the market.

However, when I visited Sabah and spoke to the minister, he was happy for us to work together cooperatively. We have signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Sabah government to bring new cultivars to research and development and share any future profits. The industry is very keen to work with me - not only the rambutan industry, but the flower industry. I intend to follow it up in the near future.

Mr WOOD: You would agree that the rambutan industry is one of the few successful exports industries?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. I am fully supportive of their endeavours and I would like to do more work with them to bring new cultivars and new varieties to Australia because I understand the ones they have now are about 30 years old.

Mr WOOD: Regarding cut flower exports – this is interstate to Western Australia - has something been sorted out in regards the problem of two inspections?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are still negotiating with the Western Australian government. We made a number of proposals they are not prepared to accept. They are very strict on their quarantine regime. We tried to facilitate cut flowers from here to Western Australia. We have not had much success because the Western Australians stick to their guns. It looks like we have to have further negotiations at senior officer and ministerial level.

Mr WOOD: So it is a long way off yet?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Horticultural audits: I believe they cost about \$24 for an audit over your property for 12 months so that you are approved as an exporter. Am I correct? There was some talk before the budget that the fee would be raised to \$100.

Mr VATSKALIS: Is that quarantine?

Mr WOOD: Quarantine, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not made a decision about it yet because we are still in discussion with the industry about the quarantine fees. The horticulture industry is supportive of the new quarantine fees, but we want to make sure that we do not disadvantage any of the small growers.

Mr WOOD: But you do not know what the fee is yet, so

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not made a decision yet.

Mr WOOD: They might not be supportive of your new fee.

Mr VATSKALIS: There are proposed figures that have come to my office, but I asked the department to have further negotiations with the industry on the level of the fees we are going to impose.

Mr WOOD: I was approached before the election, and my understanding was that they were not too pleased with the fee that might be proposed. I suppose one of their arguments is that they pay their taxes to the quarantine people; why should they pay another fee? I suppose you could argue that for many things, but I can see their point.

Mr VATSKALIS: At the same time, I have people in the horticulture industry who ask why they do not see more officers out on their farms.

Mr WOOD: I would probably agree with you as well. On the horticultural research stations, can you give us an idea of how many staff we have? Has that increased or decreased, or is it the same level as last year? Has spending on those research stations maintained the same as last year or increased?

Mr GOBBEY: In relation to the Coastal Plains horticultural research items, a small reduction, the equivalent to a 0.5 FTE between this financial year and the previous and that is ...

Mr WOOD: How many does that leave there now?

Mr GOBBEY: At the farm, on an ongoing basis, there would be two employees, but there would be others visiting on a regular basis undertaking work. The information I have from the operational program is that the withdrawal of the 0.5 of a person directly from the farm is used elsewhere in the horticultural program.

Mr WOOD: Is that our only horticultural research station?

Mr GOBBEY: No, we have Ti Tree, where the numbers at the farm on a permanent basis are static, and one FTE, but there are regularly visiting staff from Alice Springs to the facility.

Mr WOOD: With Berrimah and Katherine, do they have a horticultural research component?

Mr GOBBEY: Indeed, they do. The major focus is for mixed enterprise at those facilities. I do not have the precise details of the breakdown on the on-farm labour at each of those facilities. However, in the case of Berrimah, there is a slight reduction in the overall number of employees associated directly with the

farm - that is not the total number of employees at the site. In relation to Katherine, it is around the same as I mentioned earlier.

Mr WOOD: Regarding farm forestry, especially at Berrimah, do you have staff who specialise in the farm forestry? What is the farm forestry program presently?

Mr GOBBEY: There is one employee who spends the majority of his time on the program. The recent events in South-East Asia with developing industry in its infancy, it will be static for the time being. If there is any development to be seen over the next year to 18 months, there is an offer in principle for us to work with the Commonwealth to get additional funding into that program, but the timing at the moment is not ideal.

Mr WOOD: I am not exactly sure whether this is a horticultural question; it relates to horticultural land at Douglas Daly. As you know, it was a part of ADMA at one stage, and there were grains being grown. The infrastructure that is at the new township of Fleming - the silos - are they maintained and who actually owns them?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take it on notice, member for Nelson. I do not know who the owner is of that one. In the township of Fleming?

Mr WOOD: I have been to the Douglas Daly, minister. Yes, when the ADMA scheme was operating, there were large silos built there. I would be interested to know whether that infrastructure is ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I think we are the owners.

Mr BURGESS: If it was built during the ADMA scheme, those assets transferred across to the Northern Territory through engagement of programs. I know we have assets like those on the research farm itself. Whether there are also some at Fleming, which is a line on a paper ...

Mr WOOD: No, it has a football oval.

Mr BURGESS: It has a football oval, and a bore.

Mr WOOD: And a dressing room.

Mrs MILLER: All the important things.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mr BURGESS: It will be easy enough to find out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to put that as a question on notice?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I shall put that on notice, thank you.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you restate the question please?

Mr WOOD: What is the status of the silos that are at the town of Fleming, and are those silos being maintained?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you accept that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 8.4.

Mr WOOD: I have nearly worn myself out, except that you mentioned, minister, about the land clearing around the Daly in 1960s and 1970s - I was down there in the 1970s.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Showing how old you are, it is your fault. We know where to look now, who to blame now.

Mr WOOD: The Americans did the clearing in the 1960s.

A member: Blame the Americans.

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: The Americans owned Tipperary in the 1960s and they just cleared straight through and planted sorghum - and you know what happened to sorghum. Later on, clearing was done with help from Lands, Planning and Environment as to what land was to be cleared, and it was put under pasture. I need to put some of that into perspective. There was certainly at least more energy put into the 'scientific' clearing - I put scientific in inverted commas - of clearing that land in the second attempt. The first attempt, because it was all flat, and that is where the original damage was done.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I drove down to the Daly community and I drove 4 km - that was before the new owners took over. I counted 4 km, and there was absolutely nothing - just bare soil with nothing growing on it. The new owners have put in some hay so it holds the soil together. But it was not only that area, it was throughout Tipperary Station - 100 000 ha was cleared in the 1960s and 1970s between Stott Creek and Tipperary.

Mr WOOD: I hope that your department is looking at overstocking issues there, minister, because sometimes that is part of the problem as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: The new owners are doing a good job. They have put in improved pastures and they really know what they are doing.

Mr WOOD: As I said before, it is cropping and the way it is done that is important. If it is done badly and it is overstocked, of course, you will have problems. It does not matter what crop. That is my argument about this whole thing. That is what we should be focusing on: better agricultural practices.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there anymore questions in regard to Output 1.2, Primary Industry? That being the case, that concludes considerations of Output 1.2.

Answers To Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: I would like the opportunity to put on *Hansard* some responses to questions that were asked earlier in the estimates sessions. I table the responses to Questions 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 1.9, and 1.10.

Output 1.6 - Fisheries

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.6, Fisheries. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: First, it was just a little challenging working out the outputs in this particular area because, this year, they are not under the same heading as they were last year. If I am going off track, I am sure you will pull me back on track here.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will lure you to the right path.

Mrs MILLER: As this is my first estimates, I thought it was a deliberate ploy. Allocated to recreation fishing, minister: you have revoked capital works of \$200 000 plus additional new works of \$500 000 in the 2005-06 budget. This is in Budget Paper No 4, on page 29. It gives a total of \$700 000. Very first important question: is one of the access points for recreational fishermen to be established at the King River junction west of Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely! We have been negotiating with the pastoralists about public liability - there is an issue of public liability - and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment rather than the Fisheries has carriage of this access. We have to negotiate a number of solutions, including even

the creation of public road to facilitate access. That is a promise we made to the recreational fisherman, and we intend to keep it.

Mrs MILLER: Are you able to tell me when?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have said here before that it is something we will have to negotiate with the pastoralists. We have to find a number of solutions, but I want to do that as soon as possible.

Mrs MILLER: In relation to the other access points that you announced that you would be implementing, can you give me the locations of the access points for recreational fishing?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, that would come under DIPE rather than my portfolio, but I am very happy to tell you that one of them is Labelle Stations for the Perron Islands. It is actually the coastline opposite the Perron Islands. The other is Point Stuart.

Mrs MILLER: If that is not your area, you will not be able to tell me how much is allocated for each of those?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is actually DIPE.

Mrs MILLER: This one is definitely for you. Eighteen aquaculture licences have been issued - this is in Budget Paper No 3. Could you please provide me with a list of those that were issued; who they were issued to; and what type of aquaculture they relate to?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: Richard Sellers. To get the absolute detail I will have to take it on notice, but the 18 refer to the annual renewal of 18 aquaculture licences. They vary from spirulina algae through to prawns and barra. I am happy to get the 18 and put them on the record.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you like that as a question on notice?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, thank you.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you please restate the question.

Mrs MILLER: Could you please provide me with a list of the 18 aquaculture licences that were issued in the last 12 months; who they were issued to; and what type of aquaculture they relate to.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Will you take that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allocate that No 8.5.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many of these aquaculture businesses that have been operational for some time are commercially viable?

Mr VATSKALIS: One, of course, is barramundi – well, quite a few of them are commercially viable. One of the biggest and the most successful is the spirulina aquaculture facility. There are others - prawns. Again, the commercial viability depends on the decisions made by the operator what kind of, let us say, prawns he is going to grow this year. We have had problems in the past with people picking the wrong species to grow. Port Hurd is very successful with barramundi. The Humpty Doo aquaculture facility - again barramundi - is very successful. As a matter of fact, the Port Hurd barramundi aquaculture facility's harvest was 1000 tonnes, bigger than the wild barramundi fishery.

Mrs MILLER: How many of those aquaculture businesses are barramundi?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide you with a list of the ...

Mr SELLERS: I can answer that now if you like. There are three of our aquaculture facilities producing barramundi at the moment. The Port Hurd facility, the barramundi farm at Humpty Doo, and a site next to Blackmore River. The Darwin Aquaculture Centre produces fingerlings.

Mrs MILLER: While we are discussing fingerlings, how many more fingerlings are you going to place around the Territory - and preferably some in Mt Todd – in this next 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: We are referring to the stocking of barramundi in environments through the Territory. What we do is judge the size of the impoundment and the number of fish that are going to go in there. The best practice is just being discussed over the next couple of days actually, but the indications from Queensland are that you do a maximum stocking once every several years for these sites and that gets you the best results. Over the year that we have just had, we have put some in Mt Todd; we have done a repeat stocking in Lake Bennett from the original one that was there some 10 or so years ago; and we have put a number into Manton Dam as well.

What is being discussed as part of a barramundi workshop that is going as we speak, is what the opportunities and the lessons are that we can learn from Queensland to look for new sites. To answer the question with an ultimate figure, I cannot, because to actually increase our stocking potential around the Territory we need to identify new sites and go through a process of whether we can put them in there. For the existing sites that we have, we will definitely be putting some more into Manton Dam in this coming year, and we will be doing some trials on how successful our stocking in Lake Todd and Lake Bennett have been. Based on that, we either put some more or leave them as they are for the moment.

Mrs MILLER: What sort of monitoring do you do of the fingerlings?

Mr SELLERS: The monitoring that we are doing at the moment for the fingerlings is that we are going and sampling them after they have been in there for a period of time to check on their growth rates and the actual environmental condition of the lakes that we are putting them in.

Mrs MILLER: Those that you have monitored so far, are those successful?

Mr SELLERS: The three main ones that we have mentioned in the answer so far are all proving to be successful; some at different levels. The growth rate results that are coming from the Mt Todd stocking are exceptional. Lake Bennett will need to be checked over the next month or two before we can give you some results on that. Manton Dam has started to fish very well with some of the stocking from the previous couple of years.

Mrs MILLER: That is one saving grace for Mt Todd?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr SELLERS: Yes, the freshwater lake upstream.

Mrs MILLER: So there is absolutely no contamination of that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is upstream. It is not going to be affected.

Mrs MILLER: They certainly looked big when I saw them in the water, that is for sure.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, there are currently 27 aquaculture development projects in the Northern Territory. Could you name those and tell me what type of aquaculture?

Mr VATSKALIS: Could we take that on notice?

Mrs MILLER: Certainly.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can give you a list. We have development projects like mud crab fisheries, trepang fisheries and things like that, but we can give you a list of all the proposed aquaculture projects.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, would you please restate that question?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, there are currently 27 aquaculture development projects in the Northern Territory. Could you name those and tell me what type of aquaculture?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you accept that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.6.

Mrs MILLER: Performance measures reporting has changed from the 2004-05 budget, so again you are going to have to bear with me. How many regional communities engaged in fisheries activities during the 2004-05 year? Which are they? What are the fisheries activities? What is the cost of each of these fisheries?

Mr SELLERS: Are you talking about indigenous engagement in regional communities?

Mrs MILLER: It is just listed as 'regional communities' in the outputs.

Mr SELLERS: Output number?

Mrs MILLER: I will have to get that for you, but it is in the 2004-05 budget, regional communities.

Mr SELLERS: I suspect it is dealing with indigenous activity. I can go through a short list of those if you indulge me.

Mrs MILLER: Certainly.

Mr SELLERS: Specifically looking at indigenous aquaculture initiatives, Maningrida, Howard Island, South Goulburn Island, Ngukurr, Groote, Adelaide River, Wooliana, Croker Island and Nhulunbuy. Those are aquaculture of various types, ranging from trepang to mud crab and other ventures. There have also been some economic opportunities we are working through with associations in Nhulunbuy to do with coastal fishing licences and the potential for some fishing cooperative businesses in those areas. Elcho Island has also expressed an interest in coastal line. They are the ones that have been worked on to date, and there are some others that are planned for this year.

Mrs MILLER: Do you have costs of those fisheries?

Mr SELLERS: We have costs of the program that we are working on: \$436 000 has been allocated both in the 2004-05 and 2005-06 financial years to pursue opportunities for indigenous fisheries-related economic development, and that program is spread over the areas I mentioned before. Bearing in mind the question was on regional communities, there is also some local stuff we are doing at Kulaluk and other areas close to Darwin.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Under those performance measures, which I am still trying to find, how many Northern Territory fisheries have management arrangements?

Mr SELLERS: We have management arrangements, depending on the size, in place for the major single-species fisheries - Spanish mackerel, shark, mud crab, trepang, aquarium fish, barramundi, the demersal fishery, the Timor Reef and the trawl fishery. Pearlring has a management arrangement for the take of wild shell, but that has not been fished for the last few years.

Also in that category, it is probably worth mentioning that we now have received export accreditation - independent assessment from the Commonwealth - for shark, Spanish mackerel, mud crab, trepang, aquarium, and the demersal, Timor and trawl fisheries. Some of those would have been in the year before, but the majority were in the year just past.

Mrs MILLER: How much do these management arrangements cost us, each one?

Mr SELLERS: Output 8 relates to Fisheries Management. It is a component of Output 8 that all those arrangements are worked of under.

Mrs MILLER: Do you want to answer this one now then?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: In the 2004-05 year, for management the original budget estimate was \$6.7m, and the revised estimate was \$7.5m. In the 2005-06 budget, it is \$6.7m. There are some reasons for the variations.

Mrs MILLER: I was going to ask you that.

Mr SELLERS: In the 2004-05 year, there was an increase of \$0.8m in the predicted budget. That was an increase of \$0.43m in relation to some funding that we worked up, and the costs for fee basic from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority. There was \$271 000, some money carried forward from the Industry Research and Development Fund, which shows in the budget as a revenue. There is \$65 000 for the EBA negotiations for wage increases and smaller portions for non-cash budget and externally funded project increases.

In the 2005-06 budget, we have a change down of \$871 000, and that relates directly to the baseline farming for AFMA, being minus the \$0.43m that we got up to in 2004-05. The externally funded projects being \$300 000 less than the actual projections due to some ceasing and variations in the money that they actually gave us, and also less the \$271 000 carry forward of unspent funds from the Industry Research and Development Fund. Then there are minor bits for budget transfers and some estimates on this year.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. That is all I have, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions to Output 1.6? Member for Millner.

Mr WOOD: Is that the right order for members?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will not be long, member for Nelson.

Mr BONSON: You announced an additional \$2m over four years for improving recreational fishing infrastructure. Can you advise how priorities will be determined and what this money will be spent on?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thanks, member for Millner, for this question. As you are aware, the government promised \$1.5m in the four years before, and we spent this money for improving infrastructure in new boat ramps and extending boat ramps, not only Darwin but also around the Territory. All this happened through public consultation with all stakeholders, including AFANT.

We intend to spend the \$2m for improved infrastructure on the Territory, once again, after consultation with AFANT and other stakeholders and amateur fishermen. I am very pleased to say that we are now looking at improving not only boat ramps, but also facilities like parking, toilets, safe compounds, putting a floating pontoon at Dinah Beach, spending extra money to put a boat ramp in Hatchetts Creek. One of the initiatives we are actually going to carry out is to create a new artificial reef in Lee Point by sinking a 60-foot steel-hulled ex-fishing boat, donated by its owner. I will be contacting the owner to ask his permission to name the reef after him because of his kind donation. That will provide some new opportunities for recreational fishermen very close to Darwin. The money for the sinking of the boat will come out of the \$2m we have promised. Once again, the money is going to be spent where the people want it rather than where the government wants it.

Mr WOOD: I know you are getting thirsty, minister, but I will try to be briefer this time. I have a few questions to ask.

You put out a policy for recreational fishing, and I think you have a policy somewhere for commercial fishing. I am going to ask you a question that is a little different. Have you a policy for fish and chip shops? The reason I ask that is because, all during this election, everyone has been saying: 'We are going to buy this many licences back and we are going to close the waters down and we are going to do this and this'. A lot of people like me do not have enough time or have any interest in fishing. I do have an interest in

fishing, by the way. They would like to go to our fish and chip shops and buy a genuine wild catch barramundi, salmon, jewfish or whatever.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Trepang.

Mr WOOD: What kind of fish and chip shop have you got there, member for Sanderson?

What guarantee can you make that people in the Northern Territory, and the tourists who come here, will buy Territory fish 12 months of the year - not imported fish from Thailand, or farm fish from Bathurst Island, which might be great for export but I do not think it is great for taste? How will you guarantee that we will have enough fish so that we do not have to import fish for our fish and chip shops?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, our election commitment was not to buy 10 barramundi licences; it was to sit down with the stakeholders, the industry, commercial fishermen and AFANT, to develop - especially for barramundi - a five-year plan, 10 years out, and find out what is happening with the barramundi. From there, we said we would buy, if necessary, barramundi licences. I know there is pressure by amateur fishermen groups to buy as many licences as possible. We cannot deny the public the right to buy wild barramundi.

Coming back to the fish and chips shops, I doubt very much if the barramundi you buy in the fish shops is actually wild caught Territory barramundi. Most likely, it will be an imported barramundi which is called barramundi. My argument with the federal government is that only Australian barramundi should be called barramundi, not imported Asian, Vietnamese or Thai barramundi. I have written to the minister in Canberra asking that only the Australian breed should be called barramundi. I know that the barramundi DNA is very similar, but now you can discriminate by doing a micro quantity of DNA assessment of where this barramundi comes from. The same thing applies not only to barramundi but to other species of fish and prawns.

I insist, and have insisted, that products should have the place of origin so the consumer knows what he or she is buying and where products he or she is buying comes from. The fish you buy in the Territory would depend on the market forces in other states if it is Territory barramundi or not. Most of the barramundi caught in the Territory would find its way to Brisbane and Sydney rather than the Territory markets. In the past, you might have seen some people selling Territory barramundi because it is very difficult to sell down south; they are over-supplied with barramundi from the Territory and other areas. However, our decision to buy barramundi licences, and how many, will come out of the discussions we have with all stakeholders by developing the five-year plan, 10-year outlook for barramundi.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I certainly will be asking my local fish and chip shop. I usually can taste Thai barramundi, which does not taste anywhere near as good as our local stuff.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. I have tasted prawns that I bought without knowing where they came from. They do not taste anything like the Australian Territory prawns. I am really concerned because some of the Asian carriers will use a different kind of prawn, and they use antibiotics and drugs to combat some of the diseases that are very prevalent in their waters, while Territory prawns are quite good in quality and taste.

Mr WOOD: Getting back to my, hopefully, policy you might develop for the supply of local fish to the fish and chip shops. You also were talking about buying back coastal net fishing licences.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: We are not only just dealing with barramundi and threadfin salmon, we are dealing with other fish. Again, what guarantee? Will the buy-back mean our local fish and chip shops cannot get a supply of fish from the coastal region?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, this is not a general decision by government; it is going to be a decision after discussion with stakeholders. Not everybody would like to sell their licences. We are going to buy some licences in strategic places, rather than just buy all the licences. As I said to you before, I would like the consumer to be able buy Territory fish, and I have no intention to wipe out the industry. We will decide to buy some licences in strategic locations to benefit amateur fishermen and the Territory consumers.

Mr WOOD: Would you also accept that if you do not get the balance right, that even the tourism industry will suffer? People who come to the Territory expect to sit down and eat Territory fish.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is why we intend to take the balance right.

Mr WOOD: Don't you think that there are the dangers, especially on election time - AFANT is great friend of the both sides of politics. You have actually doubled in the budget the funding for the amateur fishing association. Obviously, you believe it is a good ally to have, especially round election time.

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not think it is a good ally to have during the election time; we believe that AFANT has a role to play, as a community group. Also, amateur fishing in the Territory is one ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is the lure!

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely! I was waiting for that, thank you very much. Fishing is the lure of Territory. A lot of people come up here for fishing. As you probably noticed, despite the [inaudible] lease by AFANT before the election, we stuck to our guns and said we are not going back; we accepted three barramundi licences over five years and we stuck to it. It was the CLP that promised 10 barramundi licences. I do not know who they were talking to, who was going to sell them and how they are going to find the money. However, we are the ones who stuck to our guns and said three barramundi licences in five years. We went for the outcome of the five-year plan, 10-year outcome before they make any other decisions.

Mr WOOD: Are these promises based on scientific research that says we will not only leave enough fish for recreational fishing, we will leave enough fish for commercial fishermen? Commercial fishermen are very few when it comes to voting but provide a lot of income for the Territory. That other avenue which I think you have forgotten is the consumer; the person who goes to the fish and chips shops, and the restaurants. Has this package you put forward in your election got some scientific basis to make sure that does occur?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have 24 barramundi licences and we said we would buy three over five years. That will leave 21 barramundi licences.

Mr WOOD: What about coastal fishing licences?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have 14 coastal fishing licences. Currently, there are five operating so that leaves nine that are not operating.

Mr WOOD: AFANT says it wants the lot, I believe.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, Cabinet will make the decision.

Mr WOOD: How important is the coastal fishing licence to fresh fish in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: The income generated is five licences. How much is ...

Mr SELLERS: I do not have the actual output on me but I can provide the member some feedback and facts around the coastal net fishery that we have on our web site as a status report we do annually. I am quite happy to pass that on. I just do not have that with me at the moment.

Mr WOOD: I know I am going back to the Daly but I do have to for a different reason. I just should make one comment that I did not make before. I lived on the Daly for a long time; I have lived out in the bush for a long time; and I have a horticultural background; therefore, I did not fall out of some urban sky all of a sudden in relation to my comments about the Daly.

There is a concern - and it was a concern when I used to live in the Daly – that we promote these great, big Barra Classics. We used to get driven out of our home when they came because, all a sudden, the quiet river went into a Bagot Road at 8 am. Is there a concern about boat traffic on the Daly and the size of motors and the wash that, perhaps, could occur from large numbers of boats using that river on a continuous basis?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that there are people complaining about the number of boats on the Daly, the size of engines and the wash. However, this only occurs at certain times of the year for a small period of time. However, the police will be visiting the Daly and have a presence there, to make sure that everybody behaves themselves. I cannot stop people buying big boats.

The other thing I found very interesting was that my idea, initially, was that the big boats would create a big wave which would break on the bank so it might cause erosion of the banks - until I actually went there and had a look at it. I found out that the big boats move very quickly - they glide and create a very small wake compared to small boats with small engines that are fully immersed in the water creating a big wake behind it. I do not know the science behind it but I would be very keen to find out what is happening.

Fisheries is prepared to help. Fisheries is doing the scientific research with regard to barramundi fishing licences and barramundi stock numbers and the costs of that. We have scientific research undertaken by the Fisheries department.

Mr SELLERS: Just a on a point of interest, the workshop that is actually happening at the same time is tasked with working out a better way to assess the fishery using more of the recreational fishing tour operator and indigenous information, as well as the commercial information, so we have a better understanding of what is actually happening with the stock, which brings us into the rivers. That is being worked on over the next couple of days and we hope to be implementing that science as of next year.

Mr WOOD: Just on the issue of boats, someone said at Shady Camp you will get boats everywhere and some of those are very big boats that should really be out in the sea. Is there an issue of the number of boats and the size of the motors? I know you are saying you cannot stop people having big motors but, in some cases, we have boats that are really meant for the open sea being on inland waters and causing problems. Should we be looking at that effect? The wash on the river had been something that has been spoken about for a long time. Is it something, for instance, for the Daly River Advisory Group to looking at?

Mr VATSKALIS: That should be looked at under the science for the Daly River. I have no problem with that and might bring it to the attention of the group that is going to do the study.

Mr WOOD: All right. The other thing I have had raised with me is the issue of catch limits. I do not know the catch limits, but I have been told that it is abused; you might be able to have so many fish per day and that is your catch limit. I know you can have them in the fridge and that is it as well. People will go fishing one day and get the full lot - say five jewfish or something - go another day and get the same lot, and go another day and get the same lot. In the end, we have really defeated the purpose of what we are trying to do in asking people to enjoy fishing? They can take some fish, but some of these people must be getting to the point of being semi-commercial.

Do we require more fishing inspectors? Is that one of the problems to make sure that, by these catch limits, they are not exhausted? Is there a need to separate what I call the amateur - which is a tinny, a bloke with his son who go on Elizabeth River for half a day trying to catch a couple of mangroves jacks - from the fellow with the big boat who is, basically, a professional angler? He has stickers everywhere - he is sponsored by more things than you can poke a stick at. Then you have your commercial. So should we be looking at grading people, not just because they are not commercial, but even within the so-called amateur section, a little more closely?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have discussed the issue of catch limits and I would like to tell you that we are going to review the catch limits together with the review of the *Fisheries Act*. I know what you are talking about. I am always perplexed about why people go out to catch fresh fish and then they fill the freezer with fish. At the big events like Barra National and Barra Classic, people are allowed to catch on their first day and, after that, it is catch and release with barbless hooks. We did a survey and discovered that 90% of barramundi put back in the water will survive. For the people who go to sea, there are some limits in place and we are currently reviewing them.

Mr WOOD: I was not able to ask this question yesterday because we ran out of time in some areas - and you can say whether or not it is your area. The Channel Point reserve, which is going to have a road that goes through Labelle Station - I know a little about it because my wife happens to live on the Aboriginal side of it, at Bulgul - is going to require a permit. Who is going to issue the permit? Is that Parks and Wildlife?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not really my portfolio. My understanding is that it will be a limit of 10 people at any time being at the reserve that is opposite the Perron Islands. My understanding is that the Northern Land Council, the Bulgul community, and Parks and Wildlife will issue the permits in agreement with the Bulgul community. That was the agreement we had with the Bulgul community.

Mr WOOD: All right. There are some other issues, but they are, obviously, with another department.

Mr VATSKALIS: Bear in mind that people living at Channel Point already have the permit to go through Labelle Station through the Aboriginal community to go down; that will not affect them. However, because the road is a public road up to the point cutting into the Aboriginal land, to get into the Aboriginal land requires a permit to go through.

Mr WOOD: Okay, but you are limiting the number of people who can go and fish through that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, 10 a day.

Mr WOOD: Ten a day, okay. On the Buffalo Creek boat ramp - I asked this question yesterday and I said that it is actually more to do with you. As you know, it is in my electorate now. There have been problems with getting permission for the caretaker to have permanent buildings on site because the land, I gather, is RAAF land.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Has that been solved yet?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Commonwealth required a greater indemnity for liability issues, and that has to be resolved before DCA give their approval for the permanent buildings. The government is working with the Commonwealth now to actually clarify and resolve this issue.

Mr WOOD: I have also been working with Nigel Scullion, but it seems to me that you have given this gentleman a lease with permission to operate that security car park and he has not been able to. If you could somehow get things to move along a bit quicker, it would be ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is Commonwealth land; we have to go along with the Commonwealth.

Mr WOOD: I realise that. It is your government, their government, I am not. We need to get it going. The other issue that was raised is that that car park actually becomes full. It is not big enough now. There will be issues in trying to increase the size because there is a lot of monsoon vine to get through there. Has the government considered what it would do if the car park is continually full?

Mr VATSKALIS: Obviously, by improving the security in Buffalo Creek it became more popular.

Mr WOOD: That is right, it has. It is a good idea, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. You should probably ask this question of Dr Burns because it is his portfolio.

Mr WOOD: I think it got thrown back to you.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is DIPE, it is not mine.

Mr WOOD: Totally, did you say? All right. You are going to do something?

Mr VATSKALIS: In respect of the amateur fishermen groups, I will be discussing it with Dr Burns to see what ...

Mr WOOD: Keith Aker thinks you are a wonderful bloke.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is good.

Mr WOOD: That is all, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regard to Output 1.6?

Mr WOOD: Could I ask one question? I left it out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is what I just asked you.

Mr WOOD: It is on the aquaculture, and it was a question that I was asked to ask about sea cages in Darwin Harbour. Is there any proposal for sea cages in Darwin Harbour?

Mr SELLERS: I understand that there are two separate groups interested in putting in a notice of intent for possible sea cages in Darwin Harbour and, should they do that, they would go through the normal approval process.

Mr WOOD: Is it true that in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park that type of cage is banned?

Mr SELLERS: I am not familiar with the rules and regulations there, sorry.

Mr WOOD: Would you have some concerns about any environmental effects of having sea cages in the harbour?

Mr SELLERS: If the question is do I think that the Great Barrier Reef rules and regulations are necessarily transferable around Australia – no, I do not think so. If there are concerns about sea cages in the harbour, that is why we have an open and accountable process for it to run through.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: An example from the port operation and so on, is that they are not adversely affecting the environment because of the enormous tidal movements and the currents in the Territory's sea.

Mr WOOD: You would not want to make it policy to ban them? Sorry. I have finished there Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regard to Output 1.6?

Non-output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, are there any non-specific output questions for Output Group 1.0?

Mrs MILLER: I have reworded this and rephrased this to get some sort of answer from you. Can you tell me how much uranium has been identified in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not a secret; a lot of research was done before self-government days. I could not give you exactly the volume of the uranium, but I know that 95% of the resources are in the Alligator area and very little outside that. If I recall well, most of the uranium mines were located at Rum Jungle where ERA is currently operating, Nabarlek, and Gunlom. Most of that area was the area where we have the most uranium.

Mrs MILLER: So, you have no idea of the amount of uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is very difficult to estimate the volume of uranium that is actually underground. From what I have read, the uranium ore you find around the Territory comes down to the geological structure where uranium is found. I do not think that really relates to the budget outlook, to discuss the volume of uranium.

Mrs MILLER: All right. Thank you very much, member for Nelson, because I now know there is compiled information on uranium deposits of the Northern Territory, of which I will get a copy.

Mr VATSKALIS: The publication is?

Mrs MILLER: It is called *Uranium Deposits of the Northern Territory*.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. By whom, sorry?

Mr WOOD: It is in your annual report.

Mrs MILLER: Your annual report.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other non-output specific questions in regard to output 1?

Mr WOOD: Yes, one other.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Non-output?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, this is known?

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: All right. There are a lot of them that we might not know about.

Mr WOOD: Minister, during the debate on the waterfront yesterday, I asked a question regarding the source of fill for the waterfront development. It was intimated that, possibly, fill could come from the East Arm area. Is that an extractive mining area? Would fill be allowed to be taken from there for such a purpose?

Mr VATSKALIS: Did they specify a location?

Mr WOOD: Yes, around where the new industry park is. I presume in that area there.

Mr VATSKALIS: Did you get an answer?

Mr WOOD: No, I did not, because the question really was based on, I gather, a number of companies had tendered to supply fill from extractive mining areas and the tenders were too high. They have a concern that now the government may turn around and just ignore those tenders and take fill from, basically, what is government land. I am asking the question: is the removal of gravel from those areas permitted?

Mr VATSKALIS: If the government decides to take fill from there, they have to go through the necessary process because the *Mining Act* buys the ground.

Mr WOOD: I did not know whether mining was banned. I know when the Jolly Street area was mined, there was a big fuss over whether you could take fill from within the Darwin area.

Mr VATSKALIS: Have we got the notice of intent?

Mr CARROLL: No, I have not seen or heard anything about that. I assume it is one of the options that DIPE is looking at in the development of the wharf area, but they have not spoken to us about it as far as I am aware.

Mr VATSKALIS: Not yet.

Mr WOOD: Well, it is very current and that is why I thought I would raise it.

Mr CARROLL: We will certainly pursue it with them, now that you have raised it with us.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0. We will shortly move onto Output Group 2.0, Management. However, we will take a five minute break. Okay? Five minutes.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 - MANAGEMENT

Output 2.1 - Minerals and energy

Mr CHAIRMAN: I call the meeting to order and call for questions on Output Group 2, Management, Output, 2.1 Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, there are. Can the minister explain to me what the budget implications are now that the Mines Department has removed the Director of Mines, Tony McGill? There are now four heads of the

department: Richard Jackson, Director of Compliance; Pamela Sanders, Director of Post-Mining Performance; Jillian Ian, Director of Authorisations; and Tony Waite, Chief Investigator. Are these four departmental heads effective and running this department? Have they been permanently appointed? If not, why not? That will be enough to get started.

Mr VATSKALIS: As you are aware, I asked for a review of the department and that was undertaken in 2004. Mike Winlaw of Network Australia Consulting carried out the review from August 2004 to January 2005. The review came to me with a significant number of recommendations - 24. One of the things which was highlighted in the review was that the borders were a bit blurry between the Business Development Division, with the Monitoring Divisions and the Enforcement Division, and should be clarified in order to avoid any perception in the community and the industry that Mines was either coupled with the industry, or they were not actually doing what they were supposed to be doing because they were concentration mainly on developing the mining industry rather than actually monitoring it and enforcing regulation.

As a result we created, as you mentioned, the four different structures. That is why we have the independent committee now that assesses and puts in place the bond. We have the Development Division; the Energy Policy and Renewable Energy Policy Division; the Mining Development Division, and we established the position of Chief Investigator who oversees major and minor accidents that happen in the industry. The Chief Investigator has the power to coopt people from other government departments, including Work Health and the Department of Health. We have the Mining and Petroleum Authorisation Division, the Mining and Petroleum Compliance Division, and the Mining Evaluation Division.

As for the operation, I will let Mr Carroll explain it further to you. My understanding is that the four managers have not been appointed permanently, or their positions have been advertised. Applicants will be interviewed and the successful applicants will get the positions.

Mr CARROLL: In terms of the overall cost, I cannot give you a specific one. However, there will be some additional costs, although not significant as a number of the positions are already at level, or about level. It is a restructuring rather than a wholesale upgrading. You have all the acting directors correct, except it is Jillian Jan, not Jillian Ian who is the Acting Director of Authorisations.

The new organisation came into effect on 7 February this year, and part of the implementation has been the description of the new directors' jobs. That was all completed and the positions were advertised on 30 April. The interview process is currently going on and, as it is not complete, I cannot give you any information. People are acting and permanent appointments have not been made. That is simply because the selection process has not been completed. Does that answer all your questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it does. No, it does not answer one: are these four departmental heads effective in running the department?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not sure whether that is really a question for estimates. I will leave it for the minister.

Mrs MILLER: Maybe I should reword it; instead of asking for a director ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are asking for a ...

Mrs MILLER: Is it as effective as having a director, or is it more effective than having a director?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. Is the new structure of the department more efficient than the previous one?

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr BURGESS: The new structure came about through a review that I commissioned. The aims of that review were to increase the effectiveness of the department in serving the interests of the growth and management of the industry, and paying due regard to community aspirations in the management and exploitation of our resources. I believe that the new structure will provide the ability for us to provide those services to the community in an efficient way. As with any new structure, the new alignment of responsibilities will take a little to bed down, but I am confident those improvements will be able to be measured over the coming five to 10 years.

Mr VATSKALIS: In addition, the role of the department is not only business development; it also has a regulatory an enforcement role. In the past few months, we have seen that the department has exercised

its enforcement role and a number of mining companies have been taken to court for breaches, or they have been investigated, and some investigations are currently under way. Certainly, ERA was taken to court and fined \$150 000 for two breaches. The department did an excellent job investigating that particular incident. Some other actions have taken place in the past few months. The department is currently investigating this incident. I would also like to mention that that was the first prosecution to be taken by the department for a very long time.

Mrs MILLER: With this restructure, is this also why the Mining Board has not had a chairman's position for the last 12 months? Is that part of this restructure?

Mr CARROLL: The Mining Board is a statutory body under the *Mining Management Act*. A number of appointments ran out at the end of last year and, for a number of reasons, including the difficulty in getting nominations from some of the bodies who nominate membership of the board - we had some delays in getting the nominations from the Minerals Council, and recommendations to the minister from the Minerals Council - there was some delay in making the reappointments. Currently, the chair is vacant but that matter is being discussed with the minister. While we were discussing it, we went into caretaker mode and it was inappropriate to continue discussing it. Those discussions will continue again shortly.

I can report to the committee that the Mining Board met on 27 June with the new members who were appointed in late May. There is not a chairman at the moment. The board can operate without a chairman, and the act has provisions in it to allow an acting chairman to be appointed by the board when it meets, so that the lack of a chairman does not prevent it from meeting or working.

Mrs MILLER: It is interesting, that you have not had a chairman or met for so long. Can you just tell me what the function of this board is?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is an advisory role to the government about different issues with regards to the mining industry and they meet – how many times a year?

Mr CARROLL: I believe there are three meetings a year required. The functions of the board are set out in the *Mining Management Act* and the way the operation of the board works is in detail in the act. I cannot tell you off the top of my head what section it is, but we can provide you with it, and certainly send you a copy of the act if you like, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I do not think you have sought very much advisory stuff from the minister if you have not conferred with them for six months.

Mr VATSKALIS: You need to remember that we actually went through the review, starting with the department. Then we approached a number of people to be chairman but, for various reasons these people - because they either relocated abroad or they did not have any interest any more in the mining industry in the Territory - advised they did not want to act on it. By the time we received this advice, elections were called. Now that the election is out of the way, we are going to move very quickly and appoint some people.

Again, on the role of the board, recently the board has been requested to provide advice on the function of the Chief Investigator to advise on the collation of safety statistics and also a business plan for the next 12 months. They are going to be meeting again shortly. There are a number of mining executives who have interests in the Territory and a number of people from government organisations and departments. The issue of the board has concerned us for a while and, certainly now, everything is free to proceed very quickly to appoint an appropriate person.

Mrs MILLER: It will be good to see them functioning. My next question, I believe you have already answered, because it was in a different output, and I am skipping over these outputs.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: It was to do with Mt Todd, so I think we have covered that fairly well.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Those are the only questions that I have for 2.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, did I see movement there?

Mr WOOD: Yes, there was movement at the station. Minister, just to show that I do not support looking after the environment, I have to ask you one of my favourite questions: what is your department doing about the no-emission form of energy ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Hot rocks.

Mr WOOD: ... geothermal hot rock energy?

Mr VATSKALIS: I knew that question was coming, so I have an answer for that. We have established now a geothermal energy task force, which is going to examine the issues of hot rocks. We are going to try to identify some of the area which hold hot rocks in the Territory.

It has been established within DBIRD to prepare and implement a project plan for the potential development of geothermal energy resources in the Northern Territory. The ultimate objective is to recommend on appropriate legislation covering exploration and development of geothermal energy resources. We believe that legislation will be drafted by mid-2006.

We have allocated money to proceed with this exercise. We are certainly going to be looking in the Territory for some locations where hot rocks are present. I believe there are some locations here in the Territory where we can find hot rocks, and we are very keen to see the development of this kind of energy.

Mr WOOD: That sounds terrific, minister. Just to put it in perspective, that is the form of energy I would prefer we have rather than having coal-fired power stations.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. I agree with you.

Mr WOOD: I thank the minister and the department. I hope we can push this along. I know there are three companies in South Australia, besides Geodynamics. Geodynamics is not that far off actually putting together a practical proposal supplying electricity for Moomba gas fields. There are two other companies now involved in exploration. If we can get this off the ground, we could lead the world in no-emission energy sources for electricity, and what I call real electricity; that is, electricity from dried energy. I congratulate the department and I hope we can keep moving forward. See? I am normal.

Mrs MILLER: It might be a very nice step, member for Nelson.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was wondering whether there are any hot rocks under your block of dirt at Adelaide River, that is all, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It is covered in gamba grass.

Mrs MILLER: He is going to have his dream realised yet.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no more questions under Output Group 2, Output 2.1, Minerals and Energy, that concludes the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I would like to table this for the member for Nelson. This is a gravity map, the one he requested. It has nice colours.

Mr WOOD: Do you know how to read it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Do you?

Mr WOOD: No, but it looks impressive. Oh, look at that!

Mr VATSKALIS: Has he got his glasses with him?

Mr WOOD: It is three-dimensional.

Mr CARROLL: No, that one is not 3D.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister, I will get you to sign it later.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are welcome.

Members interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 - Fisheries

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call questions on Output 2.2, Fisheries. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes. Given the value of Primary Industry and Fisheries production is forecast to increase by 7% in 2005-06, and your government is constantly telling Territorians how much you support these industries, how can you explain the significant decrease in the budget of 2005-06? It is in the Uniform Presentation Network book in the General Government Sector Expenses and it says there is a decrease of \$2m. Why has it been decreased overall?

Mr VATSKALIS: The original budget for 2004 was \$6.7m, and there was a variation of plus-\$800 000 that brought it up to \$7.596m. The budget for 2005-06 now is \$6.725m. The reason for that is less \$450 000 in 2005-06 with regards to funding from the Commonwealth for Australian Fisheries Management Authority; less \$300 000 related to estimates for externally funded projects like Gene Tag; new fish for old stock; mud crab, demersal snappers and Spanish mackerel; and less \$271 000 for one-off carry forward of unspent funds from 2003-04 related to NT Fishing Industry Research and Development Association. Really, it is because of external funding and a few bits and pieces of adjustments to corporate overheads, plus \$100 000 for budget transfer within the division; \$24 000 additional resource for wages; and \$40 000 adjustment to corporate overheads. The money taken out because the project is finished and were not funded any more by the Commonwealth, plus the money coming in to make adjustments makes a difference of about \$800 000. It is not a reduction in budget; just taking away money that was given to us by other authorities like the Commonwealth.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, thank you. What do you believe to be the market price for a commercial barramundi licence?

Mr VATSKALIS: My personal belief has nothing to do with the budget. What budget output do you ...

Mrs MILLER: You are going to buy one back, so what do you believe is the market price for one?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is something which is going to be determined by the Valuer-General as he did before. The Valuer-General will determine the price. How much did we pay for the barramundi licence?

Mr SELLERS: The previous licence we brought back was under a confidential deed. Basically, the person we bought the licence from has not disclosed the amount, so it is probably still commercial-in-confidence. However, to continue with the answer, the process is we ask the Valuer-General to provide a valuation of the barramundi licences where, previously, the person who does it has discussed with brokers around town, looked at the value of assets and the business, and come back to government with a recommended price range that is part of the negotiation.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. How much has your government allocated to buy back barramundi licences in this next 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: We said we are putting \$1.2m in place to buy the fishing licences. It can be coastal net licences or barramundi licences. We also committed to buy three barramundi licences in the next five years. The government is certainly committed to buy the licences; we will buy the licence and pay the money.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Would you have any idea of the cost of replacing any of the equipment that a commercial barramundi fisherman possesses?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is something that the Valuer-General takes into consideration when determining the price of a licence.

Mrs MILLER: I understand that confidentiality. That is fine. Since the election which, of course, was very convenient timing, it has been made public that there are serious concerns about depleted barra stocks for the future. Given the evidence from the very reliable watchdog, AFANT, which keeps an eye on you, would you reconsider an increase in the number of commercial barra licence buy-backs?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not know who gave you the information about the depleted barramundi stock. Of course, the barramundi stock depends on how much barramundi is caught and on the season. That was the question asked in parliament and I presented parliament with two graphs. I am prepared to table them. One shows the barramundi that was caught near capacity in 2000 when we had a very good season and, here, we have the number of barramundi caught in a really bad season. You can see that barramundi in the bad season is well below the long-term sustainable harvest of barramundi.

I do not know who is telling you fibs about barramundi having been caught. It is very close to the sustainable harvest because there are so many seasonal variations. You can see clearly in the two graphs the barramundi caught in 2000 to 2003. That shows you that the barramundi ...

Mrs MILLER: Can you table those, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. The barramundi caught in 2003 is well below the long-term sustainable harvest.

Mrs MILLER: I would like you to table those now please. Graphs always look good. Minister, what are the current research projects that you carried out in Fisheries?

Mr SELLERS: In Fisheries, the group that looks after fisheries management, we have ongoing monitoring of Spanish mackerel, barramundi, mud crab and demersal snappers. We have specific programs for inshore species such as black jewfish – that is an externally funded project where we are collaborating with a Tasmanian institute and part-funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

We are doing a collaborative project on Spanish mackerel called Gene Tag with CSIRO and, again, part-funded by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. We are doing smaller items of work on shark as part of a larger collaborative project. We have just received funding to do a spatial separation of fishing and reporting project for our offshore demersal snappers. Again, that was through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

In our aquaculture section, we are doing research on trepang as a joint project where the actual research is being done by a collaborative partner, but using the aquaculture centre. We are doing continual work on production for barramundi fingerlings and crabs. We are working with Aboriginal communities on grow-out trials for mud crabs, sponges and some initial work on trepang.

Mrs MILLER: Do you have a breakdown on the cost of each of those current research projects you have just been talking about?

Mr SELLERS: Yes. I will just check that I have it with me or whether we might need to provide it to you separately, if you just bear with me for a moment. The information I have in my folder is at a higher level than that. However, again, we are happy to provide that breakdown for you on what was spent.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, member for Katherine, would you please ask that question again.

Mrs MILLER: Certainly. What are the current research projects being carried out for fisheries and what is the cost of each of these projects?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take that as a question on notice, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allocate that question No 8.7.

Mrs MILLER: Could you name the three commercial fisheries management projects listed in the aquaculture resource management? What involvement did your department have with each of these projects? How much do each of these management projects cost in 2004-05?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Sellers will provide this information.

Mr SELLERS: The three projects in the year that we are just finishing?

Mrs MILLER: That is right. These are commercial ones.

Mr SELLERS: Yes, we are talking commercial projects. One is the continuation of getting the export accreditation for our offshore and inshore fisheries. That is an independent review by the Commonwealth. There was a review of the Spanish mackerel management arrangements, which was completed mid-way through the year. The third one would be the review of the barramundi management arrangements, which is being completed as we speak. The cost of management outputs is listed – I have it for you here if you can bear with me.

Those projects are part of the Fisheries Management component. We have Development and Management outputs, so they are part of the original budget of \$6.7m, which came up to \$7.5m with the additional inputs from those other areas. For those three specific projects that you were talking about, I do not have that breakdown with me.

Mrs MILLER: Are you able to provide that to me?

Mr SELLERS: Sure.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question please?

Mrs MILLER: Please name the three commercial fisheries management projects listed in aquaculture resource management. How much did each of these management projects cost in 2004-05?

Mr SELLERS: Can I just clarify that we are talking about the cost of the environment accreditation and the barramundi and the Spanish mackerel review?

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr SELLERS: Yes, happy to provide those.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to accept that, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, certainly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 8.8.

Mrs MILLER: What are the three indigenous projects in the Aquatic Resource Management that were supported in this last 12 months? How many people were involved in each of these projects? How much did each of the projects cost?

Mr SELLERS: I presume it is the areas where the Aboriginal Indigenous Working Group has been working, and it is more than three projects. We listed the areas where they were working and it came up to the total of \$436 000, from recollection.

Mrs MILLER: That is the total, is it?

Mr SELLERS: That is the total.

Mrs MILLER: Are you able to tell me where they were?

Mr SELLERS: I can go through them again, sure.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is the one you stated before, Maningrida, Elcho Island ...

Mrs MILLER: Oh, right. There are only three listed in the output performance.

Mr SELLERS: We ended up doing more projects, yes.

Mrs MILLER: I would be appreciative if you would be able to table that information, please.

Mr SELLERS: Sure. I do not believe there is any problem with that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: In Performance Measures, you stated that six fisheries have been accredited. What are the six fisheries, and where are they located?

Mr SELLERS: The fisheries that have received accreditation so far are the mud crab fishery which is an inshore fishery; the demersal fisheries which include deep fish trawl, Timor Reef and offshore snapper fishery - and they are quite a way offshore, the closest that they would be fishing to shore would be 25 to 30 miles offshore; the Spanish mackerel fishery, which operates wherever the Spanish mackerel grounds are, which can be close to shore or quite a way offshore, depending on where the shallow ground is; the trepang fishery, which operates within three nautical miles from the coastline; the aquarium fishery which operates from nodes around Darwin and Gove. and some boat work - mostly in shallow regions, but can operate further offshore. Since that output was drafted, I think we are up to the seven that I have just mentioned. The shark fishery has also been accredited, which operates within its boundaries. The shark fishery has to operate outside 15 nautical miles, from recollection.

Mrs MILLER: What funding have you committed to secure the rights of commercial fishing operators in the Northern Territory? Could you please provide details on the costings?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. The government has approved \$40 000 for 2004-05 as a one-off payment to enable the guided fishing tourism industry to employ its own executive. As a condition of the funding, the successful applicant is required to consult with the industry in order to recommend to government the future means by which the position can be funded permanently, and also has to liaise with the industry to provide information and advice to government.

Mr Lloyd Brown was employed in February 2005. Mr Brown will finalise the industry consultation at the end of 2005, and the industry recommendation will be provided to the government shortly. I believe it was a very good appointment, because Mr Brown had significant experience in the Northern Territory in fisheries management. Now he is currently incorporating the Northern Territory guided fishing industry association so that they become a cohesive group instead of different mandates, so we can actually work better with the industry to provide a means of developing the industry.

Mrs MILLER: What funding are you providing to compensate commercial seafood operators for any access closures or restrictions to waterways?

Mr VATSKALIS: The government has closed two rivers - the McArthur and Adelaide Rivers. In both cases, it purchased the licences and closed the rivers. An appropriate compensation was paid. It happens when you decide to close a river or to buy a right; we have to pay appropriate compensation.

Mrs MILLER: That is for any access closures or restrictions, so they are still operating. Do you give them any compensation for that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, if we close the rivers or the waters, yes, we have to provide compensation. However, if it is because of native title, or because of a marine protected area by the Commonwealth, it is not the government's decision, so we do not provide any compensation on that.

Mrs MILLER: Have you had to provide any compensation in the last 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am not aware of any compensation we have had to provide. As a matter of fact, we assist the barramundi fishery by clearly defining the areas where they can fish. Because of a previous court decision, they were excluded from some areas and we worked with the industry to clarify and make sure they are not excluded from that area. We are talking about the inter-tidal zone where they used to fish before and were excluded by that court decision. If we pay them compensation ...

Mr SELLERS: There was not a compensatory issue; it was an *ex gratia* payment which was made to one of the fishermen after the closure of the Adelaide River, through negotiation with government.

Mrs MILLER: That is what I was looking for. There has been one. Okay. What funding are you providing for commercial seafood service facilities around the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you referring to the wharves or ...

Mrs MILLER: All of that.

Mr VATSKALIS: That comes under the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

Mrs MILLER: So, we might be dumping that one across. I have to get used to all these departments. This next question probably will be too. What funding are you providing for improving the repair and maintenance of the Duck Pond in Francis Bay?

Mr VATSKALIS: DIPE.

Mrs MILLER: What funding has your government provided for the Seafood Festival to help promote the commercial seafood industry? Is that under Major Events, or whatever?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. We are happy to advise about that.

Mr SELLERS: DBIRD has supported events happening during the Seafood Week - a Seafood Ball as well as the Seafood Festival. There was a \$25 000 cash injection, part of which was going to the ball and the rest to the Seafood Festival. There has also been significant in-kind. One of the people who works for the fisheries group has been seconded full-time to help with the Seafood Festival for the last five months, and there is significant in-kind on the side of that. If you want to put a value on that it would be in the vicinity of \$60 000 or so.

Mrs MILLER: I hope it is a very successful festival. The first one last year was absolutely fantastic. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend this one.

What extra funding have you provided to increase opportunities for training in the commercial seafood industry? Or is that going to be pushed across to someone else?

Mr SELLERS: That should be DEET, I guess.

Mrs MILLER: More DEET? Okay. Have you considered the registration of all boats to determine ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The government has no intention of ...

Mrs MILLER: Not licensing the fishing operators, but the registration of boats.

Mr VATSKALIS: Which boats? Amateurs, commercials?

Mrs MILLER: All of them. Have you considered it?

Mr VATSKALIS: The boats that exceed a certain length have to go through a survey. Fishing tour operators have to be registered. Commercial boats have to be registered; however, the government has no intention of licensing amateur boats.

Mrs MILLER: You do not think it would be a good way to be able to manage the numbers by knowing how many were there?

Mr VATSKALIS: What would this provide the government with? It is better for us to have a presence and educate people about boat safety and everything else, rather than put the number on the boat, take \$50 and let them loose.

Mrs MILLER: That is all I have in that output.

Mr WOOD: I have to ask just one question, minister. You mentioned the aquarium fishing industry. There are two people in the Howard River area who supply aquarium fish. Are there any others, and have you any idea of what the value of that particular market is?

Mr SELLERS: If Mr Wood will indulge me, I can give you another fact sheet on that, along with the fact sheet I am going to supply on the coastal net, if you like, because we have that all spelt out on the fact sheet.

Mr WOOD: Good. The harvested frogs for the food industry – is that regarded as part of Fisheries?

Mr SELLERS: Parks and Wildlife.

Mr WOOD: With aquarium fish, two departments are involved? Is that correct?

Mr SELLERS: The *Fisheries Act* covers all things that have a life cycle in the water, other than some that were gazetted over to Parks about four years ago because it was better to be managed under the conservation regime. That included amphibians, reptiles excluding sea snakes, and dugongs and the marine mammals. Parks picked up that component which is outside the normal aquarium trade.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regards to Output 2.2 Fisheries. That concludes consideration of Output 2.2. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers who provided advice to the Minister for Mines and Energy, and the Minister for Primary Industries and Resource Development.

MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

Mr CHAIRMAN: I note from the schedule, minister, that you are now available to take questions for Output 5.3, Multicultural Advancement that sits within the Department of the Chief Minister. Bring forward your officers from the agency and, when settled, introduce them and make an opening statement if you so wish.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like to introduce Mr Jim Laouris, the Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and Andrew Kirkman.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT Output 5.3 - Multicultural Advancement

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call on questions relating to Output Group 5.0, Community Engagement, Output Group 5.3, Multicultural Advancement. Are there any questions, shadow minister?

Dr LIM: Yes. Mr Chairman, can you advise what time you propose to finish.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Twenty minutes past six.

Dr LIM: We will have to rush through this.

Minister, I draw your attention to page 38 of Budget Paper No 3 where multicultural advancement allocations are recorded. I note that there is a \$10 000 increase in your budget for this year, which is less than 1%. How do you propose to continue to manage your Office of Multicultural Affairs with that increase? Similarly, the sponsorships and capital grants funding was an increase of about 1.5%. How do you propose to fund that? You have to program it on the understanding that there is a CPI of nearly 3% coming up and also an efficiency dividend of 2%.

Mr VATSKALIS: From the 2004-05 original budget, to 2005-06 budget, we have a \$100 000 increase. That would translate to an additional \$2.3m and \$2.4m.

Dr LIM: Would you please correct yourself. It is not \$100 000; it is \$10 000.

Mr VATSKALIS: All right. Andrew has advised me it has been rounded up. It is actually an increase of closer to \$21 000.

Dr LIM: Together, that is correct. However, it equates to less than 1.7% increase. When you translate to the CPI of up to 3% and an efficiency dividend of 2%, you are something like 3% behind in your allocation to the Office of Multicultural Affairs for all its programs and its operations. How do you propose to keep everything going?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Kirkman.

Mr KIRKMAN: The multicultural output is also supported by the Business Support Unit within the Community Engagement Group in the Department of the Chief Minister. It has nine personnel and will be responsible for grants and other business support administration. That will provide extra capacity for multicultural advancement.

Dr LIM: Minister, if that is the case, shouldn't your budget figures reflect that you are receiving *gratis* services from other personnel?

Mr KIRKMAN: It does reflect a percentage of that business support output within the budget figures. I guess what it does not reflect is the flexibility that that provides to assist with activities when they are ...

Dr LIM: Addressing that particular point, minister, in terms of accrual accounting and fiscal transparency, surely those sorts of figures should be recorded against the Office of the Multicultural Affairs?

Mr KIRKMAN: Yes, they are recorded against there. As I mentioned, they are accorded on an apportioned basis.

Dr LIM: But not reported so that it is evident to someone looking at the budget papers?

Mr KIRKMAN: It is probably not as evident. However, in the annual report, you will see further details of that.

Dr LIM: I look forward to the minister drawing attention to that point, particularly when he provides the annual report. Was any money spent by your office in the 2005-06 post-budget promotion campaign? If so, how much was spent on printing media, electronic media, brochure production, direct mail, and DVD and CD production? Was any of the 2005-06 post-budget promotion campaign literature printed in language other than English?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that the Treasurer's office had produced material about the budget and budget initiatives in the other languages. My understanding is that the translation was done through the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the cost was about \$480. It was done in August 2004 at a cost of \$480.64. It was paid by the Treasurer's office.

Dr LIM: What languages were included?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was Greek, Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Chinese.

Dr LIM: That amounted to \$480.64 for four translations? That is very cheap, isn't it? I wonder who did that for that price?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Office of Multicultural Affairs has a pool of intelligent translators and they are paid a certain amount of money per certain number of words.

Dr LIM: What do you pay in terms of an hourly rate when you only paid \$480?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are not paid an hourly rate. My understanding is that they are paid per words. The user pay charge for translations is a standard translation per 100 words: \$19.80.

Dr LIM: Could you table that?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can table it.

Dr LIM: Thank you. You did say for this year it had been in the four different languages?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Was any money spent by your department in the 2005-06 post-budget promotion campaign itself? Did the Office of Multicultural Affairs spend any ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The Office of Multicultural Affairs did not spend any money for translation. We actually translate items and we charge people for whom we translate.

Dr LIM: Moving away from translation now, was any money spent by the Office of Multicultural Affairs on the 2005-06 post-budget promotion campaign?

Mr LAOURIS: No, I can confirm that there were no costs associated from the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Dr LIM: So the Office of Multicultural Affairs did not send any material out to ethnic groups regarding the 2005-06 Budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Dr LIM: When the documents were translated into Greek, Filipino, Indonesian and Chinese, how did you reach a decision that those were the four languages that should be used for the post-budget literature?

Mr VATSKALIS: That question should be asked of the Treasurer because he asked for the translation into these languages. We did not suggest or ask the Treasurer about the languages. My understanding is, as you know well, that Greek, Filipino, Indonesian and Chinese are the four biggest ethnic groups in the Territory. It is not so difficult to reach that conclusion if you live in the Territory.

Dr LIM: Are you able to provide copies of the documents that were produced by the Office of Multicultural Affairs for the promotion of the budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not up to us to provide those documents. We subcontracted to Treasury on the translation. This question should be asked of the Treasurer. If the Treasurer wants to provide them, he will provide them.

Dr LIM: The Office of Multicultural Affairs provided the translation; you paid for the translation.

Mr VATSKALIS: We paid the subcontractors to do the translation. We cannot disclose this information to a third party. It is an agreement between the person who paid for the translation to be done and the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Treasurer. If you ask the Treasurer he might be able to provide you this because, after all, it is his translation now.

Dr LIM: Can you detail, after English as the main language, what are the top five most spoken languages in the Territory? What do these groups represent as a percentage of the total community?

Mr VATSKALIS: The top 10 languages - and again, this is the language requested for translation, not the spoken ones. It started with Vietnamese, Indonesian, Thai, Khmer and, should the need arise we have Greek, Cantonese, Tetum, Alfoli and Islam. You have to remember that the demand for these languages depends on how long these people have been in the Territory; they could be first generation and they still speak in English. Certainly, first generation Vietnamese will have more difficulties than first generation Greeks who have been here for 20 or 25 years. Regarding the most common spoken languages in the Territory, if you look at the ABS about who is going to the Territory, the number that they give for Greeks or Chinese is totally different from the real communities out there, because they consider Greeks or Chinese as people who are actually born overseas in a country of origin rather than people who are born here of Chinese or Greek parents.

I cannot give you an exact figure of what is actually the most spoken language in the Territory. ABS would be the most appropriate, but I draw your attention to the fact that ABS statistics are not very accurate, because I know people who are second or third generation Greeks and they speak Greek at home and they are born in Australia.

Dr LIM: I am perturbed that your Office of Multicultural Affairs does not know which are the top five most spoken languages other than English in the Territory. That is what its job is: to understand multicultural issues in the Territory, to understand which languages are being spoken ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, do not take me wrong, member for Greatorex. We know what is the most commonly spoken language in the Territory.

Dr LIM: That is what I am asking you.

Mr VATSKALIS: If you compare what we say with what the ABS says, there will be a significant discrepancy. Personally, and you know very well that the Greek, Chinese, Filipino, and Indonesian

communities are the biggest ethnic groups in the Territory. These are the most spoken languages in the Territory, even if you are first or second generation.

Mixed marriages is a different story, but if you have parents who are Chinese - and from my own experience - or Greeks, they speak Greek and Chinese at home; they walk out the door and they speak Australian with an Australian accent.

Dr LIM: I am not asking for ABS data. What I am asking is: from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, what are the five most spoken languages ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We can give you the information; we can take it on notice if you like. If you want it, we can provide you with the information.

Dr LIM: Thank you.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you please restate that question, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Other than English, what are the top five most spoken languages in the Territory and what do these groups represent as a percentage of the Territory community?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take that question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I will allocate that question No 8.9.

Dr LIM: Regarding consultancies, where there any consultants employed during 2004-05 to undertake work for your department?

Mr LAOURIS: Other than the interpreters and translators which you would be aware of, there was one in question which related to a university professor with the Charles Darwin University. We have recently entered into an arrangement with the providers for some policy advice for an African consultation project that we are undertaking.

Dr LIM: Policy advice - is that specifically of the consultancy policy advice or ...

Mr LAOURIS: I would have to look at the actual details. We could take that on notice if you would like?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Okay, on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you please restate the question, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: What consultants were employed during the year 2004-05 to undertake work for the Office of Multicultural Affairs and what was the nature of the consultancies?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That excludes language translation?

Dr LIM: Yes, that is correct.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to accept that question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For Hansard purposes, I will allocate that No 8.10.

Dr LIM: Referring to that, obviously, senior consultancy, was that consultancy awarded under a certificate of exemption?

Mr LAOURIS: It was entered into pursuant to the Northern Territory government's agreement with Charles Darwin University. My understanding is that agreement does provide a certificate of exemption if the amount in question is under a \$3000 threshold. Certainly, the amount in question is going to be under \$3000, so that is the way it was entered into.

Dr LIM: I will accept that, thank you very much. There were no other consultancies required or advertised by the department for the office?

Mr LAOURIS: No.

Dr LIM: Were there any public focus groups conducted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs in the year 2004-05?

Mr LAOURIS: Yes. I have only been in the Office of Multicultural Affairs since part-way through the financial year, so I cannot really comment accurately in relation to the period before then. Certainly, during the period that I have been the manager, we have not conducted any formal public consultation sessions. Having said that, though, that is something that we are implementing, and the African consultation project is one of those.

Mr VATSKALIS: And also consultation with the different ethnic groups for the development of the multicultural policy.

Mr LAOURIS: I should also clarify that that does not preclude the fact that we have been meeting more informally with various members of the community and so on.

Dr LIM: With regards to the budget allocation as printed on page 38, are you able to provide a more detailed breakdown as to what the monies are for, so that we have a better idea of personnel, operations, sponsorships - that sort of thing?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, \$85 000 is for staffing-related administration expenses; personnel expenses, \$316 000; grants, \$1.2m; community engagement overheads and corporate services, \$258 000; marketing and promotion, \$7000; travel, \$6000; and other expenses which includes the interpreter translator payments, \$311 000.

Dr LIM: Coming to the sponsorship and capital grants program, I note that, for the last three years, you have kept the sponsorship numbers to about 95 per year. Could you detail what grants and subsidies were allocated by the Office of Multicultural Affairs for 2004-05, and how does that compare to 2003-04?

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you talking about the grants – sorry, which grants are you referring to? How many grants? Are you referring to the ethnic community development grants or to the general grants we offer?

Dr LIM: No. In the budget paper, page 38, you have 95 sponsorships provided, and that has been the same figure for three years running. Your sponsorships and capital grants allocation, however, has increased. Between 2003-04 to 2004-05 was a significant increase; I applaud you for that. However, it has been nearly the same since then for this year. Could you provide for me a list of grants and subsidies that were provided by the Office of Multicultural Affairs for 2004-05? How does that compare with 2003-04?

Mr VATSKALIS: I can provide you with information for 2004-05; I have it here. I can table it. I do not have the 2003-04, but we can actually provide you with this information later.

Dr LIM: I am looking forward to that. Thank you very much.

Mr VATSKALIS: Regarding the 95 figure, for example, here on page 38 it says '2004-05 sponsors provided 95, 2005-06 95'. The 95 is just an estimate. It might be 96, 98, or 93. We cannot foresee how many applications we will receive in 2005-06. I am very happy to table the different grants we have actually provided to the community.

Dr LIM: I accept your comment that you do not know what is going to happen with the coming year.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is right.

Dr LIM: However, I note that for the last two years it has been 95 and I am making that comment.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Coming back to the interpreter service, how many services have you provided in the last 12 months and to what language groups? If you could also ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I can provide this information. We have provided 2345 on-site interpreting services.

Dr LIM: Three hundred and ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That is 2345. We have also provided 717 translating services. Also, on top of that, we had the two interpreters to Royal Darwin Hospital – the Chinese and the Greek – who provide an extra 726 on-site interpreter services.

Dr LIM: This interpreter service is distinct from the Aboriginal interpreter service?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Dr LIM: The purpose of the interpretation is mostly for health ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We have medical about 1100, followed by legal, 613. Then, we have everything else - welfare settlement, training workshops. But the majority is actually medical and legal.

Dr LIM: Are you anticipating any other staff changes in the Office of Multicultural Affairs for this next 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not really. We have five staff. That is actually an operational matter; the director should reply to that.

Mr LAOURIS: Can I just ask you to clarify. Are you referring to actual people in positions or structure-wise, the number of people?

Dr LIM: Structure-wise. Personality is not my concern; it should not be my concern. Structure-wise it is going to be the same?

Mr LAOURIS: To my knowledge, yes.

Dr LIM: I have just been reminded, minister, regarding the question about who was responsible for the translation of the post-budget promotion material. Treasury said they did not produce any budget documentation in any other language other than English. So, somebody did. You said the Treasurer requested the translation to the four languages. We asked the question of the Treasurer and I have just been reminded that he denied producing any budget documentation in language other than English. This is a conflict of information now. Can you ...

Mr LAOURIS: Can I just clarify that when the Office of Multicultural Affairs is approached to translate a document, it is purely like any other business transaction.

Dr LIM: You are the agent and the client asks you to do something.

Mr LAOURIS: Exactly.

Dr LIM: Okay. Your office is now telling me that, as an agency, you have provided a service for a client - the client being the Treasurer. I am saying now that evidence is conflicting. The Treasurer says they do not produce any budget documentation other than in English. You are saying that you did four; those languages being Greek, Chinese, Indonesian and Filipino. I suggest, minister, that you guys better have a talk to find out who is right and who is wrong.

Mr VATSKALIS: I suggest, member for Greatorex, before you make these kind of - not allegations - but the fact that we actually produce a translation does not mean that the Treasurer is going to print them and

distribute them. We only produce a copy of each document we get and we provide it to the client. If you ask us to translate something, we give you the translation. It is up to you then to go out and print 10 000 or 5000 copies or decide you are not going to, it is too expensive. Treasury, in 2004-05, asked the department to produce the translation. They were produced; they were paid for. The electronic copy was provided to the Treasurer. If the Treasurer has decided not to go ahead with that, well, that is the Treasurer's business.

Dr LIM: Did the Treasurer pay the Office of Multicultural Affairs for the service?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$480.

Dr LIM: That was what you paid the interpreters.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no. The Treasurer paid \$480 because of user pays principle. The Office of Multicultural Affairs charged the Treasurer's office \$480 to do the translation. We provided the document and that is the end of the arrangement. If the Treasurer wants to produce them, or not, that is his business.

Dr LIM: The Office of Multicultural Affairs invoiced the Treasurer for the services rendered?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, \$480.

Dr LIM: Okay. So the Treasurer paid the Office of Multicultural Affairs?

Mr VATSKALIS: To my knowledge, yes.

Dr LIM: Then you paid the translators?

Mr VATSKALIS: We pay the translators because user pays.

Dr LIM: Therefore, addressing that in a financial sense, there should be a way of tracking that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. However, if the Treasurer wants to produce 10 000 copies of translation in Chinese afterwards, that is his business. He can do what he likes with it.

Dr LIM: I am not accusing him of anything. I am just getting it clear in my head that the Treasurer says one thing and you said you did produce documents in four other languages for him.

Do you have staff on secondment from other departments? If so, what are their levels?

Mr LAOURIS: No.

Dr LIM: Are there any staff within the Office of Multicultural Affairs working in your office on secondment in Parliament House?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not that I am aware of.

Dr LIM: Not that you are aware of. I think this is English as a second language.

Mr VATSKALIS: No. No, it is not.

Dr LIM: I do not think you mean that: not that I am aware of'. You are not aware of who is in your office?

Mr VATSKALIS: I would be aware of someone from the Office of Multicultural Affairs was in my department. But I am not aware, and there is no one working in my department ...

Dr LIM: I am just trying to ensure our semantics are correct, that is all. Okay.

How many advertisements did your department place on your behalf in the print media in 2004-05?

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you referring to my office directly, or to the Office of the Multicultural Affairs? That is just to get the semantics right.

Dr LIM: The Office of the Multicultural Affairs.

Mr LAOURIS: We basically advertise in relation to matters such as grants and the like. I do not have a figure that I can give you now, but we can certainly take that one on notice and provide you with that information.

Dr LIM: All right. Mr Chairman, I draw your attention to the response that they do not have the information at the moment, they will take it on notice and provide me with the information, if you want to put it on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: I might be able to help with that one. The money we spent in marketing and promotion was \$6794: advertising \$4960; display \$263; and marketing material \$1470.

Dr LIM: Can you translate that for me: how much in that total amount of money translates to time that it was advertised?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide that information of the time when the advertisements were made, but that is the amount of money we spent.

Dr LIM: So you are going to provide that information as well?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So is that a question on notice?

Dr LIM: Well ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It seems that information is provided.

Dr LIM: Okay. Are you happy with that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you are, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: I am happy with that as long as the information has been provided. Minister, has your ministerial office provided any advertisements using yourself in the print media?

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly.

Dr LIM: What is the cost to your office and how many times did that translate to in terms of in the last year's period?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were a number of advertisements in the media that were organised by my office and generally related to ethnic communities' events and celebrations. The money came from the ministerial allowance, and the ministerial allowance comes from the Department of the Chief Minister. The costing should be provided by the Chief Minister's Department. It is not my money. All publications, all types of newspapers, are in accordance with a long-term policy that has been in place since the previous government.

Dr LIM: Minister, last year, we went through this long, arduous debate.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I know. I recall it very well.

Dr LIM: At the end of the discussion, you did provide those figures. I believe you agreed that you were the one who signed off on all those advertisements and, therefore, would be aware of the cost involved. Are you able to provide me with those figures without me having to chase around a rabbit warren to finally track them down?

Mr VATSKALIS: Last year, I recall very well, and I checked out *Hansard*, you were inquiring about an advertisement in the *Sunday Territorian* with regards to Greek Glenti. Once again, I said despite the fact that the advertisement had my photograph in it and it was signed off because it was produced by my office, the payment came through the ministerial budget which is under the auspices of the Department of the Chief Minister. The Department of the Chief Minister will be able to provide the information. That is nothing new; it happened before and it will happen again, and it happened in your time.

Dr LIM: No, I am just saying that you could. You provided the figures last year.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the figures with me, but that should be asked of the Department of the Chief Minister.

Dr LIM: So you are not going to provide it this time?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot because I did not organise the payment. The Department of the Chief Minister organised the payment. I do not have the figures.

Dr LIM: What was the expenditure to your office to hold functions and events in Parliament House as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs? Who were the functions for and how many people were invited to the functions?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot produce an answer off the top of my head; I might take it on notice. However, once again, it is the Department of Chief Minister that actually pays the money, and the Department of Chief Minister can provide this information to you.

Dr LIM: Surely, again, the expense is something which your office generated ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The ministerial office?

Dr LIM: That is right, and you would be aware of it. I am sure that you have a budget which you manage. I know that you get at least monthly reports from the Chief Minister outlining what your expenses are. Do you not know?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, for the simple reason that the expenses are per head and, in fact, you have so many people you invite and so many do not turn up. This money is paid by the Department of Chief Minister, not by my ministerial office. You know that very well. You were there and you did not pay from your ministerial office: it was the Department of Chief Minister which paid all these accounts.

Dr LIM: Do you know that you could get a hard copy printout of your monthly expenses in your office from the Department of Chief Minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I know, but the fact that I am taking a hard copy - I am not going to give you this information now. First of all, I do not have the information with me. The facts are that it was organised by Protocol, not through the ministerial office, and Protocol comes under the Department of Chief Minister. All this financial information regarding functions should come from the Chief Minister's, not my ministerial office.

Dr LIM: We will not labour on this. When I asked you earlier for a full listing of sponsorship grants for ethnic communities, you promised that you would provide that list ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The list is tabled.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Does that list include Central Australian organisations?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. Alice Springs Multicultural Community Service Central Australia, \$45 000; Alice Springs Multicultural Community Service Central Australia \$3800, \$4800, and \$5100 – it is all listed there, and what the purpose for the funding is too.

Dr LIM: Thank you. I recall last year, I asked you whether you provided funding for rental assistance for the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia. Have you maintained this over the last 12 months, and do you intend to maintain this for the next 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have provided \$45 000 operational funding, and that is the first year of a triennial funding.

Mr LAOURIS: In relation to rental assistance for the Multicultural Community Service of Central Australia, there is an arrangement where DCIS Property Management actually pays rental for their premises, therefore, the \$45 000 which is provided through the Multicultural Affairs Sponsorship Program relates to operational funding. However, rents are done through DCIS.

Dr LIM: What does that amount to, do you know?

Mr LAOURIS: I do not have that with me. However, I can provide that to you if you would like.

Dr LIM: It would be good to know what they receive in rental assistance.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Will that be a question on notice then?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not ours, it is DCIS. However, we are happy to dig out the information and provide it directly to the member. There is no point in taking it. We will provide the information, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Do you run any particular programs which allow ethnic organisations to apply for assistance other than the sponsorship which you have from the government?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have the Linguistic Awards, the Harmony Day projects, and emergency funding, which is up to \$2000 small grants for organisations, and the communities' facilities upgrade project.

Dr LIM: I understand that some ethnic communities apply to you for assistance in obtaining a motor vehicle or premises. Do you provide that type of assistance as well?

Mr VATSKALIS: The motor vehicle actually comes under the Treasurer because of his capacity. We will not provide the premises but we will provide a grant if they come to us with a legitimate application for a grant outlining what the purpose of the grant is.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, how long do I have?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Until 6.20 pm.

Dr LIM: Okay. Can you tell me whether you, through the Office of Multicultural Affairs, or as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, provided any V8 passes to anybody in the ethnic community?

Mr VATSKALIS: VIP passes?

Dr LIM: V8 passes.

Mr VATSKALIS: V8 passes. No, I did not provide anything to the ethnic community. Not as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, certainly not.

Dr LIM: Regarding this publication that you tabled in parliament a couple of months ago, you recall that, basically, we drew your attention to some significant errors in the tables of this document. Is there anything you can do about correcting the errors that you have there?

Mr VATSKALIS: You recall very well that in my reply, I pointed out and highlighted why the errors were made and what was the purpose of these errors. In the next publication, we will probably be looking to adjust them accordingly just to avoid any misunderstanding by the public. There was a particular reason why this one was taken like that, and Jim can actually explain that.

Mr LAOURIS: The particular errors occurred because of the way that the database that DCIS manages on behalf of the Northern Territory government that records personal particulars of public servants was actually structured. In terms of the various fields it had, there were some inaccuracies there. We have been advised by DCIS that that has been rectified.

Dr LIM: When can we see a new copy or new edition of this, and this one removed because of the inaccuracies?

Mr VATSKALIS: When the next print-out comes out, they will be accurately reflected.

Mr LAOURIS: What we could do is update the version that is on the web site very quickly, and the publication when it does come out again.

Dr LIM: Minister, I have not had time to look through the list of sponsorships that you tabled. The Mabuhay Association in Alice Springs recently had celebrations of Filipino Independence Day. Was there any assistance provided to the group?

Mr VATSKALIS: There was not, and Jim will tell you why, because I also asked the same question.

Mr LAOURIS: That particular application was received as part of the Round 1 2005-06 Multicultural Affairs Sponsorship Program. Of course, this particular Independence Day celebration occurred in June, which is this financial year. Given that we cannot, basically, back-date grants, we could not look at that particular application.

Dr LIM: It may be something that the minister wants to take on board. The further you are away from Darwin, the more difficult it is to stay connected with the office. Timing of applications, obviously, is a big thing. Maybe organisations such as Mabuhay need to be given a heads up early enough so that they can provide these sorts of applications at appropriate times?

Mr VATSKALIS: I absolutely agree with you. That is why we advertise in the local media and notify the people directly about all the awards. I personally spoke to Mabuhay when I was in Alice Springs. I explained the situation to them and said: 'If you postpone your celebration and have it in July then, quite legitimately, you can apply for funding for the new financial year'. But they did not want to do it; they wanted to do it on whatever the date was. Of course, we cannot back-date.

Dr LIM: Independence Day was ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I know, I know, but ...

Dr LIM: ... in June and for them ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They should have applied before they did.

Dr LIM: I understand that, minister. That is why I am saying that they need a heads up early enough that they can put an application in for June to help celebrate.

Mrs BRAHAM: You could always tell them, Richard.

Dr LIM: Beg pardon?

Mrs BRAHAM: You could always tell them, and help them put it in, if you want.

Dr LIM: Thank you very much for that. I am saying that is your business, minister, and your office should be doing that.

Mr VATSKALIS: But we are already doing it. We put advertisements in the local media in the *Centralian Advocate*, and we directly communicate by letter with all the ethnic groups - not only in Alice Springs and Darwin, but also in Katherine and Tennant Creek. It is unfortunate that they did not put the application in. I am fully supportive. I would be very happy to support them if they were prepared to postpone it, but they wanted to do it before the end of the financial year.

Dr LIM: Well, it is like trying to celebrate Greek Easter on Christmas Day. You just cannot ask people to postpone things like that.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. Our national day falls on 25 March and we celebrate it on 28 March, 30 March, or 23 March, which is more ...

Dr LIM: Which is within a fortnight, which is what they wanted to do. They cannot do that in July.

Mr VATSKALIS: We notified people through the media, and personally. The only thing we do not write is an application for them. The member for Braitling is right. It is our role to help them out in these situations and notify them because we are aware of these things.

Dr LIM: The Mabuhay last year also applied to the Office of Multicultural Affairs for assistance for some of them to come to Darwin to join in the Barrio Festival. That was also knocked back.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no. We talked to them and we provided some grants. We discussed providing some grants and they knocked it back because they wanted to, I believe, come by aeroplane rather than by bus. Some negotiations took place and at the end they did not want to come.

Dr LIM: You are trying to recollect. Can you give me more accurate advice as to what exactly happened with that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will go back and have a look at it and give you some advice about that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question on notice?

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please restate your question.

Dr LIM: I would like to have it on notice. It makes it more formal. Would the minister provide advice regarding why the Mabuhay Association's application for assistance for some of their association members to come to Darwin for the Barrio Festival was declined last financial year.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Will you accept the question, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allocate that question No. 8.11. Please continue.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, I understand the member for Braitling is champing at the bit with a couple of questions that she might want to ask. Apart from the gratuitous advice that she gave, I will offer her the 10 minutes left, because some of the other questions I have can probably be asked by formal notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your consideration on that, and I will try to get back to you as time permits, shadow minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, member for Greatorex, for allowing me time to do this. Yes, I was as surprised as you were that Mabuhay did not get the application for funding for their night which was, as usual, a great success.

Minister, I am aware of the number of events you sponsor or host in Darwin. Could you give us a figure of how many events you hosted or sponsored in Alice Springs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry? As Minister for Ethnic Affairs?

Mrs BRAHAM: In Multicultural Affairs.

Mr VATSKALIS: That has to come from Protocol from DCM, but I undertake that we will provide some information to you. We can actually tell you how many events were sponsored last financial year in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: I was thinking of the type of functions that you promote in Darwin and attend yourself, and looking at those that you actually promote and attend in Alice Springs.

A Witness: So provision of funding?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, the multicultural events that you attend as ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, like the Italian reception.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide this.

Mrs BRAHAM: You do not have those?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I do not have it on the top of my head, no.

Mrs BRAHAM: Possibly because it was not many?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not necessarily. I was going to come to Mabuhay celebrations but, unfortunately, there was another event in Darwin. In the Dry, it is crazy. If I had another two clones, we would all be busy.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, as you probably are also aware, the Migrant Resource Centre in Alice Springs was extremely disappointed when they did not get refugee status. Even though it is a Commonwealth function, what involvement does your department have in assisting in this way? I noticed recently there have been some new refugees in Alice Springs. Have they come through your department's assistance?

Mr VATSKALIS: We provide to the Multicultural Community Service Centre Australia about \$61 760 in funding. We would like to see more refugees in Alice Springs. I have written to the minister asking her to put Alice Springs on the map again as a place of destination for refugees.

Mrs BRAHAM: I guess that is what I was thinking of rather than the monetary support. What support does your department do to lobby the federal government, because I know most of them go to Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have asked them to reinstate Alice Springs as a destination for refugees.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you have the figures on how many of our migrants or refugees who have arrived in the Territory over the last 10 years have taken Australian citizenship? A bit of a left-fielder, I know.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a Commonwealth matter.

Mrs BRAHAM: I realise that, but it also a statistic that is very interesting and important to the Territory if we are to retain these people and make them part of our work force. I am well aware that, in Alice Springs, every time we have an event like that, there are a couple of refugees who do it. I thought it might have been a stat that your department would be interested in compiling.

Mr VATSKALIS: We cannot take it on notice because we do not have the statistics, but we can certainly talk to DIMA and provide you with the information.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you get back to me and provide me with that information?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: That would be most useful. Mr Chairman, that is all I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions from the committee? Member for Greatorex. Whoops!

Dr LIM: There you go. As a local member, I ask the minister about Harmony Day in Alice Springs. The functions are not as big and festive as they used to be. I wondered whether the funding you are providing to Alice Springs is not quite adequate. Perhaps you should be looking seriously at supporting it a bit more than what you have these last 12 months.

Mr VATSKALIS: We provide the grants for Harmony Day depending on the applications we receive from every region. We had quite a few for Harmony Day. From Alice Springs in particular, we received applications from the Acacia Hills School, the Multicultural Community Service of Central Australia, 8CCC community radio, InCite Youth, Alice Springs High School and Sadadeen Primary School. We received six applications at nearly \$6000. If 10 applications come from Alice Springs, we would be very happy to support Harmony Day anywhere.

We support Harmony Day in Tennant Creek, in East Arnhem – Nhulunbuy combined schools lodged an application that we supported. The Pine Creek Community Government Council submitted an application. I would be very happy to take 10 or 20 applications from Alice Springs and I would consider them.

Dr LIM: No, you got my question wrong. I know that the schools like Acacia Hills - I think the year before it was Ross Park Primary School - all applied for funds to run their programs in a very localised area, whereas the representative group in Alice Springs, the former Migrant Resource Centre, was the centre of all multicultural activities in Alice Springs. When it sponsors a program, project, or an event, most people of different ethnic backgrounds turn up to that because it is well publicised. That organisation is very well supported. What happens then is, when you have Harmony Day promoted by the organisation, you get much better community involvement, whereas the smaller, disparate groups will do their own little thing within their own little areas. I suggest to you that that is probably a better way to spend your money promoting Harmony Day: when the whole community is involved.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you, but if we receive an application from the Central Australian Migrant Resource Centre, as it is called now, we will certainly consider it. At the same time, we cannot exclude the small school because Harmony Day is not only for the ethnic communities; it is for the mainstream, Aboriginal and the ethnic communities. I have seen in some schools where I have attended Harmony Day functions that not only are the Chinese, Greek-descent or Aboriginal kids there, but the mainstream community is there and they do a fantastic function about Harmony Day. Harmony Day is about all Australians, about all Territorians. If the Central Australian Migrant Resource Centre wants to apply for extra funding, the department will certainly consider it and I would be very happy to support it.

This year we had a fantastic Harmony Day. Actually, we had two functions at the same time: one for the senior citizens and, immediately afterwards, there was a reception hosted by my department and we had a significant number of people drift from one function to the other.

Mr CHAIRMAN: May I ask a question, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: All right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It just leads on from where you mentioned about the function for senior citizens from multicultural backgrounds. We are acquiring an ageing population and we will be faced with some quite complex issues with an ageing multicultural population. Are we at all moving in any way to have a look at the issues that an ageing population will present?

Mr VATSKALIS: My experience as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs is that people who come from another country - first generation migrants - tend not to move away from the Territory, they stay in the Territory. Now we have an ageing Greek and Chinese population. In a few years time, we will have an ageing Indonesian and Vietnamese population. This is what we are trying to do with the multicultural policy; we are trying to encourage the department to address and identify these issues. In employment, one of the big problems we have at the moment is that we do not have nurses who speak languages other than English. We do not have people in nursing homes who can actually speak another language and, when people get old, and they are first generation migrants, tend to revert back to their original languages, and isolation could be terrible.

In my own electorate in Casuarina, I have a Greek lady in the Masonic Home. She is the only non-English speaking background person in the Masonic Home and she is very isolated. The Greek neighbours go and visit her, because there is nobody else who speaks her language. This is one of the problems we have to really address.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, could I ask another question to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will even allow you to run 15 seconds over.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that. With regards to Harmony Day; how many applications have come recently from indigenous organisations in Alice Springs in Central Australia seeking assistance to hold Harmony Day?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the information with me now, but I will find out and let you know.

Dr LIM: Are you going to take that question on notice, or are you just letting me know?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. I am aware we had some of the indigenous schools that came to us with applications for Harmony Day.

Dr LIM: I would like to think that ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do we have a question on notice?

Dr LIM: As long as the minister has undertaken to give it to me, I am happy with that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: On that note, committee, we are over questions. I would like to thank the minister for attending and also thank the officers.

Mr VATSKALIS: Papunya School, Manyallaluk School. I have them here. Actually they are ...

Dr LIM: Tell us for Alice Springs.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have Alice Springs here with me but I ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order, minister! I have just shut you down.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I thank officers from the Department of Chief Minister who brought advice to the minister today. The committee will resume at 7 pm for Family and Community Services.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I welcome the minister and note from the schedule that you will be answering questions on Family and Children's Services, Aged and Disability Services, Mental Health Services and Public Health Services, which sits within the Department of Health and Community Services. I invite the minister to introduce the officials accompanying her and to make an opening statement if she wishes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Before we begin, I would like to introduce David Ashbridge, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of Health and Community Services and Rose Rhodes, Assistant Secretary Community Services. As the Minister for Family and Community Services, I will be taking questions on all output groups that relate to Family and Community Services, Aged and Disability Services, Mental Health Services, and Alcohol and Other Drug Services, the latter of which is under the Public Health Services output. My colleague, the Minister for Health has already advised this committee of the expected end of year budget result for the Department of Health and Community Services as a whole. My colleague gave an overview of the Department of Health and Community Services budget construction in 2004-05 and in 2005-06 which applies equally to my portfolio.

I would like to make the observation that outputs within my portfolio have increased by \$6m or 4.2% during 2004-05, and are projected to increase by \$9.8m or 6.5% in 2005-06, even after the structural changes referred to by my colleague and which substantially impact on several of my outputs. Within my portfolio, apparent negative variations affect each output, as explained by my colleague. They relate to structural changes within the budget in a highly complex mega-department such as Health and Community Services.

There are many steps in preparing budgets, and explanations for these variations are often complicated. Two of my output responsibilities - Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis, and Support the Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions - are examples of reduction in output numbers resulting largely from department-wide restructuring of corporate charges. They do not represent a reduction in services or resources. The reduction in allocation of \$569 000 and \$362 000, respectively, is largely the result of the following two factors. The first is that the Corporate Services budget for 2005-06 which was reduced by \$3m, absorbing the department's efficiency dividend and the impact of reducing inflation funding adjustments to 2.25% in 2004-05. This was done in order to maximise resources allocated to service delivery areas. Overall, this leads to reduce cost affecting all outputs. The method of attributing the Corporate Services costs to outputs was updated for 2005-06. Costs are still attributed by applying allocations based on the number of personnel, the relative size of the budgets, the number of computers employed in an area, and the value of assets supporting the output.

Services previously aligned with the Community and Health Services have been transferred to Acute Services, as this output group has consistent growth, employs the most people and has the largest proportion of the department's budget, and now attracts an increased proportion of the corporate costs compared to previous years. Therefore, other outputs have a reduced level of corporate costs and an apparent reduction in funds. Within each budget there is a substantial element of the increased NT funding to cover increases due to CPI and EBA flow-on impacts.

Turning now to the overall strategic direction of government and the department, we are now into the second year of *Building Healthier Communities*, our five-year framework for health and community services

in the NT. In 2004-05, there were a number of significant achievements and turning the vision of *Building Healthier Communities* into reality, and this work will continue in 2005-06; in particular, some of the highlights of Family and Community Services' budget initiatives for 2005-06 that give kids the best start in life, support families and communities and tackle substance abuse. We have, again, increased funding to our non-government partners, provided substantial funding to continue with the child protection reform which commenced last year, and injected \$0.5m into an innovative intensive family support service to work with our most vulnerable families. \$580 000 has been provided to support the Nhulunbuy Night Patrol and staffing operations of the special care centre.

\$10m will be provided over five years from 2004-05 to implement the new *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act* which provides legislative support for the establishment or rehabilitation and treatment services across the Territory. Now, there will be increased options and opportunities for people with volatile substance misuse problems.

We will continue to fill the gaps in Mental Health Services by establishing community-based residential care services in Darwin and Alice Springs with 24-hour support for people with mental illness and their carers. In addition, a child and adolescents psychiatry service for rural centres will be established and services to enable more suicide prevention work in regional remote communities will be expanded. I look forward to questions from the committee.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the statement?

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 - FAMILY AND CHILDREN SERVICES
Output 3.1 – Childcare, Early Childhood Development
and Parent Support Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Family and Children Services, Output 3.1, Childcare, Early Childhood Development and Parent Support Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Hello, minister, and welcome to the staff from Health. I have a number of questions and I hope to get through them all. I know my colleague, the member for Katherine, will want to ask you some questions about environment and heritage. I am hopeful we will get through them all.

My first question, minister, in this output area is: in June 2003, you announced funding of \$300 000 for the Katherine child and family precinct. Can you advise us how has that progressed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, we did, and that was a fantastic announcement. It was after both the Chief Minister and I had gone to Katherine for Community Cabinet and had quite a good meeting. One of the issues that came out of that meeting was the need to look at expanded child-care places in Katherine.

A one-off grant of \$300 000 was provided to the Katherine East Childcare Centre Association in June 2004, and that was for the design and construction of a community room, and office accommodation for children's services support organisation by July 2007. This grant is a contribution towards the development of a child and family precinct being planned by communities steering group. That group comprises the child-care centre, Katherine Town Council; parents; the Defence Force at Tindal; my departments of both Health and Community Services; Katherine Toy Library; Katherine Family Day Care; Australian Breast Feeding Association; the Casuarina Street Primary School; Isolated Children's Parents Association; and the Katherine Isolated Children's Service. It supplements other initiatives and funding organised through this group.

The steering group, as I understand it, has now employed a project officer to undertake planning work, and an architect has prepared a preliminary master plan for the proposed precinct. The group has sought other funding and community partners, and it is expected that the location and scope of services to be provided will be finalised shortly. The timing of the construction of the community room is dependent on other elements in the precinct.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. Madam Deputy Chair, you will like this question. In June 2003, you announced funding of \$140 000 to the Karama Primary School to increase support services and facilities for families, with a focus on parenting assistance. Can you, in much the same way as you did with the preceding question, advise us of how that is going?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is progressing; it has been given to the services at Karama. To go one step further, one of our election commitments was a further commitment of looking at Karama as becoming a family hub. That would complement the next step of what we have done with the \$140 000. If you are seeking additional information in the same step as I have done with Katherine, we can certainly provide that as we close off the output. I have given you part of it; however if you would like, before the output is closed off or before we finish off the Community Services output tonight, we will have that information for you. We will take that on notice.

Ms CARNEY: No disrespect, just a fulsome answer in much the same way as the Katherine one.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Question on notice, no worries. For the purposes of Hansard I will ask you to restate that question.

Ms CARNEY: In June 2003 you announced funding of \$140 000 for the Karama Primary School to increase support services and facilities for families, with a focus on parenting assistance. Can you provide details please of how that has progressed?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated she will take that question, which becomes question No 9.1.

Ms CARNEY: That concludes the questions for this output, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other questions from members of the committee on output 3.1? There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of output 3.1.

Answers to Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Before I call on questions for Output 3.2, I will table answers provided to you for estimates question Nos 5.5 through to 5.13.

Output 3.2 - Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on output 3.2, Court Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis.

Ms CARNEY: In Budget Paper No 3, page 122, the estimate for this output for 2004-05 is \$13 400, the budget for 2005-06 is \$12 831. Can you explain the apparent cut in this budget and provide the reasons for same?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Firstly, what you see in Budget 2005 is increased funding to the Family and Children Services output group. Further, in line with our stated commitment to reform the child protection of the Territory in our allocation of \$53m for this purpose, the Family and Children Services output budget is increased in 2005-06 by \$3.1m. The apparent reduction which you are looking at under Output 3.2, Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis, is an example of the budget variations which I talked about in my opening speech, resulting largely from departmental-wide restructuring of corporate charges. It relates to a waiting exercise conducted each year whereby Corporate Services costs are realigned against the output group. It does not represent – and I would like to stress that – a reduction in services. However, if you want or are seeking further detail of that waiting cost and how those variations are done, I could certainly hand over to the acting CEO of the department.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I would be grateful mainly because, on the face of it, it does look to be so significant.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The 2005-06 budget for this output group is \$12 831m. That is made up of a series of ons and offs and I will just give you the ons first.

There is a growth of NT funded initiatives or program expansion totalling \$515 000. There is CPI and wages funding growth totalling \$175 000. There is also additional Australian government funded programs totalling \$102 000.

The offsets associated with this output is a reduction in one-off externally funded projects for \$39 000; a reallocation of resources to meet service demands of \$58 000; a reduction in Australian government funded programs of \$175 000; a reallocation of corporate resources to meet service demand of \$283 000; a carried forward of the Australian government funded programs from 2003-04 into 2004-05 of \$380 000; and reviewed service mapping and overhead allocation of \$426 000.

The on and off difference there is \$569 000 with a budget for the year of \$12 831m.

Ms CARNEY: Can you elaborate on the reference to Corporate Services? What are they?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The Corporate Services were mentioned a few times in the presentation there. One of them is, as the minister highlighted, the apportionment of Corporate Services overhead to an output based on the number of personnel and the budget. So there has been a realignment of Corporate Services overhead to each output group, which has largely resulted in a proportioning of corporate overheads around this output group going to other areas of the Department of Health and Community Services as highlighted in the example of community health. In this case, individuals in family crisis have had some of their corporate overheads moved to the acute care sector, primarily - which is saying that there is no change in the service delivery, it is just that there has been some allocations around output groups and reflecting that change in output groups has been reapportioning of corporate overheads.

Ms CARNEY: You sound like people from Treasury!

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I am a doctor by trade!

Ms CARNEY: With respect, what is the difference between corporate overheads and corporate services? I want to know what it is. Can you give me an example through your minister of corporate services? What are they?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: IT charges; proportioning all the support services which are in the department and allocating them by output group in all the support services which exist within the department – IT services, library services, financial services, human resource services. All the services which are associated with supporting service delivery are defined as corporate and the reallocation of those is based on the proportion of the budget primarily that each output group has. If there is a movement between output groups and there is a reflective movement in the overhead or corporate costs. It is the support services which support the service delivery; that is what I am referring to as corporate.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for dumbing it down for me. Having listened to what you have said to explain the significant variation, can you, minister, give an assurance that that variation will not have any impact on NGOs such as Salvation Army Homeless Services and so on?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I can give that commitment that there will not be. That will not have any implications, not just for the non-government sector, but also there will not be a reduction in the service that the department, particularly Community Services, and the support that it provides for the wider community. The non-government sector actually benefited quite well out of Budget 2005, where we put in the indexation which, for the first time, went to non-government organisations. There is no indication that there would be any reduction to those non-government organisations.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I say that, really, having regard to the information contained on page 126, which shows the reader that there is no expectation that demand will reduce. In other words, demand will stay the same. Of course, it is important that I ask, in light of the demand and the variation whether anything be affected, and I accept your advice that nothing will.

Moving on to a slightly different matter but still within this output area. You issued a press release on 1 May 2005 saying: 'Since 2001 the Martin government has increased support to the Department of Health and Community Services by \$207m, an increase of 43%'. Do you agree that the changes to the totals in funding are affected by the change to accrual accounting during this period and, if so, how much of the ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What was that?

Ms CARNEY: I have a second part, but I am happy to let you answer the first bit. If so, how much of this \$207m is reflected as an increase caused by the change in the reporting of the account?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was specifically for Community Services, you are saying on that press release, or was that affecting the whole of the department?

Ms CARNEY: It is 1 May 2005, the heading: 'Extra \$1.1m indexation to non-government sector'. The first paragraph: 'The NT government will provide an extra \$1.1m in indexation for the Territory's Health and Community Service organisations in 2005-06 to take into account increases in the cost of delivering services'. It is about something specific. I am happy to hand it to you if that assists, but there is the ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When you asked the question first, it seemed like you were saying that I was quoting that there had been an increase across Community Services. I take it that press release was the new additional money or the increase for non-government organisations in terms of the indexation that was quoted. Is that right?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, there was. However, the final paragraph of this press release says: 'Since 2001, the Martin government has increased support for the Department of Health and Community Services by \$207m, an increase of 43%'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That would be total budget across the board.

Ms CARNEY: I am using that as a ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Total.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That would be the total budget.

Ms CARNEY: Well it appears that way. My question ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Within that. I have just answered it.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry, I missed the answer. What was it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You asked me whether that figure and that increase was the total budget.

Ms CARNEY: No, I will put the question again.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: While you are putting the question, would you provide the press release to the table staff. Perhaps they could photocopy it and give it to me.

Ms CARNEY: She does not want it, I do not think. I am happy to. Do you want it or not?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I should have one of my own press releases, but if you want to table it, I can have a look at it and clarify that question, and we could ...

Ms CARNEY: If that assists, I am very happy to do it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We could come back to that question, if you like.

Ms CARNEY: I am really not trying to be difficult; I will put the question again. In light of what you have ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am glad you are not being difficult, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: I am being happy, relaxed and comfortable, minister. I assure you this is not a trick question. In light of what you said in that media release: 'The Martin Labor government has put in an extra \$207m, an increase of 43%', my question is in two parts. Do you agree that the changes to the totals in funding are affected by the change to accrual accounting during this period. If so, how much of the \$207m is reflected as an increase caused by the change in the reporting of the accounts?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister and Leader of the Opposition, now that I fully understand the question, it is better asked in the non-output specific budget questions, because it is broad, not specific to Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis. However, it has been asked, so it is now at the minister's discretion whether to answer it now, or we hold it over to the non-output specific budget questions.

Ms CARNEY: I would just like an answer, one way or the other.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You will get an answer.

Ms CARNEY: Is your position now you are not sure? If that is so, please say so, and we can come back to it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, it is a question of whether we answer it under this ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I just ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... or answer it under ...

Ms CARNEY: Please let the minister answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, hold on. Hold on.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, hang on. I have a role to play here and I am just playing it.

Ms CARNEY: Well, so has the minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, but what I am saying is, it comes under a different area which is the non-output specific budget related questions. The question is: do we properly hold it over till then, which has been the process today, or does the minister want to answer it now?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We could answer it now, Madam Deputy Chair. I would like to invite Geoff Chambers to the table and he could set about answering the question for the member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you so much, minister.

Mr CHAMBERS: Geoff Chambers, Chief Finance Officer of the department. The answer is yes, we have adjusted the figures backwards.

Ms CARNEY: What was the last bit?

Mr CHAMBERS: We have adjusted the figures backwards to be able to make that answer. The answer is yes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you very much.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: These things make you happy, don't they?

Ms CARNEY: I am just a girl who wants to ask an honest question and get an honest answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And you got your answer. We are not denying you the answers to questions.

Ms CARNEY: This could be a longer night than I anticipated.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no. Go on.

Ms CARNEY: Try this one. Last year, you launched the Katherine Regional Plan in an effort to reflect the direction of the *Building Healthier Communities* strategy. On page 11 of the plan, there was a key priority called Addressing Service Gaps and you stated that one of the things you will do is, and I quote: '... to redevelop and enhance homeless services in Katherine'. What has been achieved in the past year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What I will do, member for Araluen, so that you get an answer for that - I am just trying to recall. There have been a number of plans that have been launched over the last year-and-a-half,

and I am just trying to recall the plan that you are talking about in Katherine. Was it the aged and disability plan flowing from *Building Healthier Communities*?

Ms CARNEY: I have a whole lot of material in my office. When I was typing the questions, I just referred to it as the Katherine Regional Plan 2004.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Of the *Building Healthier Communities*?

Ms CARNEY: Well, yes, it must have been. But I am not sure. I thought you being the minister, you might.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am just trying to recall that. Yes, I am the minister but at that time I was not available for launching that plan. Jenny Scott, who is the director of that area, was down there. I was not in Katherine at all, at that stage.

Ms SCOTT: That initiative relates to working with the crisis services which are predominantly SAAP funding - that is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program - and working with them to better realign and rearrange the services in Katherine. As a result of that we did work with all the services; brought them together and looked at where the gaps were. As a result of that a number of services have changed their service model and are now working with a similar client group, but in a slightly different way, so that fewer homeless families and individuals are slipping through the net in Katherine.

Ms CARNEY: Through you, minister, the key priority, which was called Addressing Service Gaps, has worked on the basis of you saying that fewer people are slipping through them? It has meant it is effective?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It has. Flowing on from that, one of the areas which we have worked with and where I did go to Katherine and open such a service that was picking up those gaps, was the Katherine Women's Crisis Centre and the expansion of that service picking up those gaps with families in need of support in crisis. There has been some movement towards it. We are talking about areas which have been neglected for such a long time, and trying to put in place systems and programs, and to get and fill everything. We have come some way towards that, and there is still more to do. We are not denying we are still some way from it and there is still more to do but, yes, it has worked, and it is good.

Ms CARNEY: For the last three days I have had political speeches from all your colleagues prefacing or going after answers to specific questions. Can you please do me the courtesy of providing the information to the questions? I thank the representative from Health for providing the answer to my question.

I have a second question in relation to it: in the Katherine Regional Plan of 2004, there was a dot point which stated that the Katherine Crisis Service System Redevelopment Project will be implemented. Could you tell me what that means?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Given you do not want to hear any further spin and you would like to have the answers, member for Araluen, I will ask the director, Jenny Scott, to answer your question.

Ms SCOTT: The minister has referred to one of the initiatives that has been part of the implementation, which has been the redevelopment of the Katherine Women's Crisis Service where they have moved buildings and location and, thereby, changed the way the service is delivered to women and children in crisis. There has also been work done with another organisation to change from providing support just in the houses they operate to providing an outreach model and, thereby, servicing a broader range of families. The work has been at the service level with the funded services in that region.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you very much. Minister, the Northern Territory Council of Social Service met with your department prior to the budget being announced in an effort to negotiate increased funding for their sector. Their lobbying, as I understand it, was based on their research in the community services sector which demonstrated a number of shortfalls. One of the main things they requested was the provision of growth funding for community organisations to address major gaps in service provision, as well as existing and growing client demand. How does the budget for 2005-06 address gaps in the services and the increasing demand of the current services for individuals and families in crisis around the Northern Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to your question, member for Araluen, this is actually a good news story and I will try not to put as much spin on it. However, when you have success, you have to celebrate it, and

our government, in working with NTCOSS – you might not like it but you are going to hear it. I listened to you and I give you the courtesy and respect of listening to you ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry. As a lawyer, I am just used to question-answer, question-answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am sorry, but you are not here as a lawyer; you are here as the shadow and ...

Ms CARNEY: No, and you are not here as a witness.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, I am not here as a witness. You are here to ask – and it is not a matter of prosecution and sitting there as a lawyer. You are here as ...

Ms CARNEY: It is about being direct and giving a direct answer to a direct question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are going to listen to it anyway. Cabinet approved a new indexation methodology for the department, applicable for 2005-06. The new methodology is based on an index and it takes an account both the NTPS wage increases, which is 75% weighted, and CPI increases, which is 25% weighted, to acknowledge the NTPS wage increase in 2004-05.

This is something about which, by the way, the feedback from NTCOSS was very favourable in that we had actually aligned that indexation in the budget to this. Indexation for 2005-06 will be based on historical inflationary data resulting in an indexation rate of 4.15% being applied to recurrent funding agreements. An additional \$1.130m is provided in 2005-06, and in 2006-07 and future years. The indexation rate will be calculated on the Northern Territory estimated wage and CPI increases as published in the Northern Territory government budget papers. For more detail, and if you want more detail to break that down further and on how that will apply, maybe we can get Geoff. Is that satisfactory, member for Araluen?

Ms CARNEY: Possibly. That is an explanation as to the way funding is determined, but can you identify in the 2005-06 Budget how the addressing of gaps in services and increasing demand for current services for individuals and family in crisis is going to be achieved?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Giving that increase and putting that indexation will allow more funding to flow to those NGOs. That is not all of it. Of course, there is more that needs to be done with the sector; I recognise that. I also recognise that we have come some way with building the capacity of some of those NGOs to be able to cope with the demand because that demand is increasing. However, we are going some way towards meeting some of that demand with them.

Ms CARNEY: Is there any idea - and it might not be possible, or some sort of projection or prediction as to when the demands will be met? I guess all ministers for Health say that things will never be met in our lifetime, but ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We would all like to wave a ...

Ms CARNEY: ... do you have data you know that deals with: 'Okay, since we have done this, in the next five years, we would expect these outcomes'? Do you have that sort of information? If so, what is it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No. That is one of the things that is difficult; getting consistent data to try to ascertain an estimate. If you look at the performance measures and those support services for clients, particularly around SAAP services, which is an area where there is an increasing need - and that is something that is being negotiated at the moment - at Budget Paper No 3, page 126, and at those clients assessing crisis support services and go through that, you will see that the estimate almost looks the same. Even though we know that demand is happening, those estimates have stayed the same.

The 2004-05 Budget, in Budget Paper No 3 last year, was to have been the first year that data was reported against this measure. That measure records the number of clients accessing crisis services for non-SAAP funded NGOs. As I said, there is no national database or data collection system for this type of service, and we are not the only jurisdiction. Most jurisdictions are actually struggling to try to develop these systems to be able to get their own definitions and measurement tools to be able to weigh and look at that increased demand.

The first phase of this work is being completed in 2004-05, with a definition and description of family support services and activities. The second phase of the work is needed to create an agreed data definition. As I understand it - and I will get this confirmed if I am right - that will be done with the NGO

sectors. There will be cells in the NGO sector working together to try to get some agreed measures to be able to look at this whole area, even though the performance measures have not moved. As you can see in Budget Paper No 3, there is that demand.

Ms CARNEY: I guess as the collection of the data improves and you have a better model, or the model you want, then it necessarily follows that, if there is an increased demand based on the data that may require additional funding as you are going along over time, you would be able to project, say, two to five years or something like that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, and it is not just funding. This is something that has also to be part of the negotiations with the Commonwealth, because a lot of the SAAP funding comes through from the Commonwealth government. One of the requirements is to develop better data systems and work through with the Commonwealth to get extra funding because, otherwise, that demand then shifts on the non-government organisation sector. We are certainly not going to demand that the non-government sector put in place systems that are just going to be another added burden for them to report. It is an issue that we are working through with the Australian government through the negotiations with SAAP.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes the questions for that output. Are there any other questions for Output 3.2, Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis? There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Child Protection Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 3.3, Child Protection Services.

Ms CARNEY: I have one question, but it might be in a non-specific output, so I will come back to that one.

Earlier this year, Centacare was awarded a \$500 000 contract to help high risk families who have been identified through the Child Protection Agency as being at risk of losing their children to foster care. There was an article in the *Northern Territory News* about the same time about this, which I am happy to table, which said:

Each family would be assigned two workers for several months who could stay with them from 7 o'clock in the morning until 7 o'clock at night.

I will offer this article to you; you may not want it, but you can let me know. My questions are: has that been occurring; how is the program going; and what are the expected outcomes?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to the latter part of your question, the launch of the Intensive Family Support Service has been a great one, because that certainly moves toward the commitment that we made of funding and looking at alternative services, particularly with children at risk, rather than putting them in care. That service is still fairly new in its development as I understand. I suppose with a lot of services, going through the phase of development is going to take some time. If you just hold on a minute, I will ask the Director of Community Services area, Jenny Scott, to provide you with a more detailed response in terms of the Centacare project.

Ms SCOTT: The service actually began taking clients on the 1 June this year ...

Ms CARNEY: This year?

Ms SCOTT: ... so there was a period of time leading up to that where our staff and the Centacare staff worked together to define the model to develop a common assessment tool so that families would not be assessed over and over again, and that the issues of requiring support for the families would be clearly identified when they were referred. All of that work was done. All of our staff and the Centacare staff were trained in that model together. There was a period of time when the service was being established and training and those measuring tools were being put in place, so clients began being referred on the 1 June.

Ms CARNEY: I appreciate that the door has opened very recently but, so far - where are we, 6 July? - how many families have been assigned to workers? Have any families been assigned to workers to stay with them from 7 am until 7 pm?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Jenny.

Ms SCOTT: I do not actually have the detail of the client-by-client breakdown. The reference there to the model of service is a fairly generic reference as to how families would be serviced. Centacare has employed a range of staff to work with families. I do not actually have the detail you are asking, but the service model was based on a generic range of services and then, depending on the family's need, the workers would be with the family at the periods of time in the day that the family needed.

Ms CARNEY: What is the long-term goal? To some extent, it is self-evident, but I would like to hear what the expected outcomes are. What do you want to achieve by this?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Out of the Intensive Family Support Service?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, what do you want?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The ultimate goal is all about the protection of children: working with children, and those families and ensuring that we - the reality is we are talking about families who are struggling to cope. If one of the goals of that service is to work with those families who are struggling so that children are better taken care of and protected, then that is probably the best outcome that you could get from this type of service. Then you do not have children coming into the care of the minister and staying in that care for many years. You are allowing and keeping that child as part of the family unit, and you are working with that family and ensuring that they get the support that it requires.

Ms CARNEY: Is it going to be reviewed; if so, when and by whom? Sorry, evaluated. When is it going to be evaluated?

Ms SCOTT: The evaluation model is being built into the plan, so the organisation is providing us with data so that we can regularly monitor the number of referrals and the success of those referrals. We are planning to do an evaluation after 12 months to inform both the future direction of that particular service and whether or not other services like that can be developed elsewhere.

Ms CARNEY: Through you, minister, will you be reporting - not necessarily you, but people working with you or the department - the outcome of that evaluation straight to the minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would presume that the evaluation would come back to government. It would come back to government, member for Araluen. I assume so.

Ms CARNEY: Do not ask me! I have never been in government. You seem uncertain.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If we have set up – well, no, because I am trying to gauge where you are coming from with the question. It is ...

Ms CARNEY: It is just a question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am always expecting a double-edged question to what you are asking me.

Ms CARNEY: It is not trickery. It is just a question, I promise you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If I am hesitant it is not because I do not want to answer, it is because ...

Ms CARNEY: It is because you are wondering where I am coming from ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... if I answer, and I am waiting where you are coming from in the next ...

Ms CARNEY: With hand on heart, minister, please forget the past. With hand on heart, you know I feel very strongly about this area and, sure, we have had ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am not denying that you feel strongly ...

Ms CARNEY: ... but please, you need not worry; I am just asking questions, and I just want the answers.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can we go on with that evaluation? It is important to evaluate these services because, as Jenny said, it provides us and the department with information of future models and how we

move down the next step. I will hand over to the Acting CEO who can elaborate a bit more in terms of the evaluation.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I give an unequivocal yes, we would report to that ...

Ms CARNEY: Thank you so much.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: ... success or otherwise.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, earlier this year, my predecessor in this portfolio, Sue Carter, raised the matter regarding the lack of child protection staff at Tennant Creek. As you know, it was a cause of major concern for everybody, and there were a number of media reports about it at the time as well. Could you advise what the current situation is with respect of child protection at Tennant Creek now?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It has not only been the former shadow - and I must say she did a very good job in her portfolio responsibility in this area and was very committed, as no doubt you are, member for Araluen - the member for Barkly has constantly reminded us over the last 12 months that there are some real issues. We are not denying that there has been, and part of that has been trying to recruit staff in to Tennant Creek to deal with this issue. That is certainly an ongoing issue, however, it is one we are working towards.

I am working with the member for Barkly to look at different service models such as the Intensive Family Support Service which we have in Darwin and whether that is a model we can move down the road within Tennant Creek. In terms of part of your question regarding staff, it is with FACS at the moment, staffed by two professional FACS workers and two Aboriginal Community workers. Was it just FACS that you wanted to ...

Ms CARNEY: I did not refer to FACS. The question was could you advise what is ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The child protection workers. We have two professionals, and in the operation and at what levels those two special FACS workers are, I hand to the Acting CEO.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The two FACS workers at Tennant Creek are both on P2 level.

Ms CARNEY: Are they permanent staff? Are they social workers? Do you have to be a social worker these days to be a FACS worker?

Ms SCOTT: Social work is our preferred qualification; however, we set the level as eligibility for the membership of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Australian Psychological Society, or the Australian Institute of Welfare Workers. There are a range of qualifications which meet those three professional associations' eligibility. However, social work being a four-year qualification is our preferred qualification.

Ms CARNEY: Are the two people at Tennant social workers, do you know?

Ms SCOTT: I know that one is, and I think they both are.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on that output?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I was wondering whether to ask this one, however I might come back to it. Minister, in your statement regarding child abuse made on 24 August 2004, you will remember that I had a fair bit to say in the Chamber. Two weeks after your statement, I wrote you a letter. I raised a number of questions in my debate and asked you to answer them. We exchanged a few letters, and the long and short of it is that not one answer - do you have a problem, Madam Deputy Chair?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, no. Did I say anything?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Then I do not have a problem.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. ... not one answer to any of my questions was provided. So I am hopeful, some 11 months down the track, I might be able to get some answers. I will start here: you said in your

statement that you and your government were 'building economically and socially sustainable communities that are more confident and capable when it comes to child rearing'. I ask: how? Is there a budgetary allocation for this, and where is it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The letter that you wrote, I did respond to. It is unfortunate that you feel that my response to that letter has not adequately answered all of the areas you asked about.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, come on, Marion!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Oh, come on, member for Araluen. You were asking for reports ...

Ms CARNEY: I am asking for information, so I will do it now. If you do not want to answer that question, I am happy to move on to another one.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I felt that I had adequately responded to your letter.

Ms CARNEY: Your first letter said that you were not prepared to put departmental staff to the effort of providing me with those answers. I think a second letter was simply an acknowledgement of the second letter I wrote to you requesting that you provide answers. You stood in the Chamber and made a very lengthy statement about child abuse.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I know; I recall that statement.

Ms CARNEY: Given that you are an open, honest and transparent government, and given the budget estimates is all about scrutiny of government spending, I propose to go through now all of the questions that I have asked in relation to your statement to which I do not have one answer. So, let us go.

In relation to the question I had just asked, do you want me to ask that again or are you choosing not to answer that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You just asked me about my comments in that statement in which I said our government is building economically sustainable communities. That is not a bad goal. That is something that we are moving towards in terms of our *Stronger Regions Stronger Futures* document. That is the focus of this government, to build the capacity and work with those communities to be able to build them economically.

Ms CARNEY: The question was: how? Is there a budgetary allocation, and where is it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This is across government as well, member for Araluen. If you recall that statement, it was about our government; it was not specific that FACS, my department, was going to be doing this. It was our government and it was a general statement that this is what we are moving towards.

Ms CARNEY: It was a general statement of what you were moving towards. That is a little different from ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In terms of this output on child protection, I know this is part of the statement that I presented. However, I question whether this is relevant to this output or whether it would be relevant to the non-specific output.

Ms CARNEY: No, minister, the output we are in ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That question is.

Ms CARNEY: ... is Child Protection Services. Your statement was about child abuse and the services that your government ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am well aware of what my statement said, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. You have answered your own question. We will move on to another question I have.

You said in your statement: 'We are reviewing our family support programs to ensure that we are targeting more vulnerable families'. No details were provided of the review. Could you please provide

those details now and whether a budgetary allocation exists in relation to reviewing those support programs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of those reviews was part of the child protection reforms that we have brought in and have been doing, member for Araluen. However, to provide you with some details to that, I will hand to the Director of Child Protection, Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: What we have been doing is working through the framework for a family support service system for the Northern Territory. We have not had that in the past, so that involved looking at, from best practice and from research, what sorts of services should exist across a continuum so that families and children can access a service that best meets their need. Having done that work, we now have a framework which we are using to work with our existing funded services so that they can determine whether or not they are kind of on the right page or need to shift a little bit.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in your statement you said that you were developing first response guidelines. Can you explain what they are? I am uncertain.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will hand over to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: What we are referring to in first response guidelines is how the first calls are made and responded to. Again, that is involving looking at our practice and comparing that with best practice and determining a range of responses to a notification that is received so that the response that is made again is more tailored to that family's need. That may mean a referral to another agency that may be working in the family support framework or a response with the police. We are reviewing and tailoring those guidelines for staff.

Ms CARNEY: The minister said that the department was developing those first response guidelines in August 2004. Have they been developed? Has that been finalised or is it an ongoing process?

Ms SCOTT: It is definitely an ongoing process, and it will be determined to some extent by services in a region. One set of standard responses is not going to work in small communities as against in Darwin. The work that we are doing is with the regional networks and regional services. It is an ongoing process.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement: 'We will progressively establish service programs aimed at enabling problems to be identified and remedial work to be commenced early and locally'. Could you provide some details, please, of what you mean by that statement? What programs have been established? For instance, what sort of remedial work has been identified?

Ms SCOTT: Again, that is happening at a regional level, so in some communities where there are existing services as I described before in the Family Support Framework Project, we are working with the existing services to tailor those so that they can better reflect the clients that they are now receiving and to take referrals from the child protection system. We have also worked with the Commonwealth on a couple of projects to develop some new services or enhance existing services so that, again, they can better meet the needs of families.

Ms CARNEY: What is a service program? Could you explain what that is?

Ms SCOTT: Would you mind repeating the sentence?

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I will quote it again: 'We will progressively establish service programs aimed at enabling problems to be identified and remedial work to be commenced early and locally'.

Ms SCOTT: The terms there are probably somewhat interchangeable. Sometimes, a service may be, say, Centacare's Intensive Family Support Service. The program they may deliver is one that may be tailored to families, for example, where mum may have a mental illness and the family may be struggling with their financial resources and other things. The program is tailored for that family. It is a sense of different terminology.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement, and I quote: 'We will take bold actions when required to protect children'. Could you describe what is meant by those 'bold actions' and whether there is any reference to the budget? I could not see any, but if you can point some out, I would be grateful.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Any reference? There has been a huge increase in child protection and new monies. Would you like me to go through what we have done with the new monies?

Ms CARNEY: I do not understand what is meant by you saying you would take 'bold actions' when required to protect children. I would be grateful if you would outline what you meant by 'bold actions'. I am happy for you to do generally, but I was also looking for examples in the budget. So, lead me through it, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Okay. Some of those 'bold actions' that we have been able to do. We have developed and tended the Intensive Family Support Service for families in contact with the child protection system and their children. When we are talking about bold action, it is not about shying away from a lot of these issues either, it is putting in place systems and working with those communities to get, and to try to deal with, the issues on the ground with child abuse and child neglect.

We have developed out-of-home care strategic plans to guide redevelopment of care options for services for children in care; developed training frameworks for FACS and non-government workers; and developed frameworks for Family Support Services that will be used to guide the development and re-development of services in the future. If you require further detail and information on that, I would pass it over to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: There is a range for 2005-06. In the next year, one of the bold actions ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, by next year, you meant 2005-06?

Ms SCOTT: Sorry, yes, 2005-06. I forget we are in that year already. One of the things that we are doing is implementing an indigenous child and family support project in partnership with the Australian government in Alice Springs. I am talking to them at the moment about a couple of other locations.

We also currently have secured some funding through an agreement with the Commonwealth for a police and FACS more integrated response to domestic violence in Katherine. That project is not yet under way, but the funding has just been announced for that.

We are strengthening and enhancing our training for both our own FACS staff and also for non-government workers. We are particularly doing some improvement to our out-of-home care system for children and families, particularly for those with challenging behaviours and in very high care need.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, in your statement you said this: 'Since the change of government, the number of notifications of abuse for Aboriginal children has nearly doubled. It has increased by 96%'. I asked in the Chamber and I ask again now: how was that measured? Was a line drawn under the 18 August 2001, and did the phones start to ring on the 19th? How is it measured and what sort of analysis was undertaken and who undertook it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Again, I will hand to the Director of Family and Children's Services.

Ms SCOTT: The figures are based on the Institute of Health and Welfare figures for child protection notifications for Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal children for the years - I think, I do not have in front of me exactly the ones you are talking about. But from 2001-02 through to 2003-04; it could have been the year before. I do not have the exact figures that you are referring to with me but - so we were looking at the increase in notifications for that period.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, and based on the Institute of Health and Welfare figures. Sorry, so you presumably looked at 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04?

Ms SCOTT: Yes, and the data is collected from each jurisdiction and collated nationally by the institute.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Why has there been, minister, an increase in reporting of child abuse in Aboriginal communities which apparently happened also immediately after 18 August 2001?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, you just assumed that we said it was after 18 August.

Ms CARNEY: I can read you the paragraph from your statement if you like.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: One of the things I did acknowledge in that statement, member for Araluen, is that there had been a huge increase and the numbers were increasing. I am not trying to be facetious or smart here. I am stating the obvious that, yes, there was at that time, looking at those statistics. It was actually quite alarming to see the huge increase that had been happening. When we looked at the comparative data from two years before that to when we came to government – now, I am not saying that in 2001 due to a Labor government that suddenly all that reporting was there - that trend was showing for two years. If you follow the comparative data from those two years you could see the steady increase. When we came to government and at the time when the reporting was coming out, I then became minister in that portfolio. Around that same time, I think the NSAICC Report - that is the National Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Childcare - also came out. There was also a report tabled from NSAICC, regarding the indigenous numbers. It did show the Northern Territory having quite this huge increase and that number was increasing.

I took the approach - and full credit also to my predecessor who was the former Minister for Health and Community Services, who took it into Cabinet and fought for the new money - there was and still is an urgent need to get more funding into this area, particularly to deal with child protection issues out in our remote communities. It was not a means of grandstanding. Certainly, the numbers are increasing and because I am an Aboriginal minister it makes me look good to stand up and to say that the numbers are going up and I am going to do something about it, or beat my hands on my chest about it. It still is a concern. As I have been aptly described as getting on my high horse sometimes about these issues, I will hand over to the acting CEO.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: There are a couple of issues here. One is that, as you increase awareness and increase services, it is not surprising that you get an increase in notification. That is just an outcome of service improvement, service enhancement, and community awareness. There are a couple of trends that are worth flagging. From 2001-02 up until 2003-04, there has been a general increase in the overall number of notifications going from 1500 to just on 2000.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, what years were they? 2003-04?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: In 2001-02, 1520; 2002-03, 1562; 2003-04, 1968; 2004-05 in total 2006. Separating those into Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal children - without reading all the figures I might just give you the differentiating percentages within those numbers. In 2001-02, it was approximately 50:50 with 51% being in the Aboriginal population and 49% in the non-Aboriginal population. The Aboriginal population with that overall growth is 51% to 56% to 63% in 2003-04, with a concomitant reduction in the non-Aboriginal population of 49% to 44% to 47% - although I would point out that even those are growth figures. However, as a proportion of the total number, there is an increasing number in the Aboriginal population.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement, and I quote: 'Finally, child abuse in Aboriginal communities is being addressed'. Could you please provide me with details as to how it is finally that child abuse in Aboriginal communities is being addressed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There are certainly more resources and part of the new money is putting more resources out in those communities, such as more community-based workers. It has taken some time for that awareness and the courage of a lot of indigenous women over many years, member for Araluen, as you would know and I am sure you would be aware of. For a long time there has been a silence, and now those women have been courageous enough to stand up and start doing it. There are more resources in the clinics. People have become more aware in dealing with this issue and so there is certainly a greater awareness to report.

Ms CARNEY: You referred to more resources and you said that it included more community-based workers in the communities. Can you provide details as to which communities and how many community-based workers are in these communities?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In terms of workers, we have employed two new indigenous cadets and two indigenous foster care support workers. There has been the employment of four ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, where? Is that Territory-wide or ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will just go through some of the numbers and then you have asked for the breakdown in these communities.

There has been the employment of four new community resource staff to work exclusively with these communities. With the implementation of the Indigenous Child and Family Support Projects in partnership with the Australian government with local communities, part of that is happening within one of my own communities in my electorate with the Commonwealth; that is, on the Tiwi Islands. Also at Wadeye and there are sites in East Arnhem. There is the Tiwi Islands, Wadeye, East Arnhem, Borroloola and Alice Springs working across the regions.

Ms CARNEY: So there are two indigenous cadets, two foster care workers and four new community resource staff to work in communities - eight. I ask where exactly are those eight people located first, and then I will ask another question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is more of an operational question and I will defer to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: The two indigenous foster care workers are based in Alice Springs and service the Central Australian region. Of the two Aboriginal cadets: one is here in Darwin and one was living and working at Wadeye but has moved into town as I understand, but is predominately working with our Darwin remote team. The four community resource workers are based at Wadeye; in Nhulunbuy but working with several of the communities around Nhulunbuy; working with Borroloola but based out of Katherine; and working in Alice Springs but working with the outstations.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry Borroloola, but based in Katherine?

Ms SCOTT: Yes, and Alice Springs at this stage working with the outstations. They are the positions that you just asked about.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. A few questions arise, minister. I do not know how many Aboriginal communities there are around the Northern Territory. Do you?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There are many, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Fifty or 60?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am not denying that, and I know that you reacted when I said there is more to do - and there is more to do. There are a whole lot of other positions and areas that we have to do. It is not saying that we do not have and are not trying to build and recruit staff into those areas so that we can get greater coverage across those regions. I would like to see a greater number of indigenous people employed in this area working with those communities. It would be great to get those people into those communities. That is taking some time and there are some difficulties. We are not saying that we are closed to that, and recruitment and getting those people on board will continue.

Ms CARNEY: When you said, at page 12 of your statement on 24 of August: 'Finally child abuse in Aboriginal communities is being addressed', did you know that there were only eight spread amongst all of the communities in the Northern Territory and, if so, why did you say it is being addressed? It falls a bit short. You said in your answer you would like to see more, and there is more to do, but you did not say that in your statement.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is being addressed. That is eight more than what was in the system to start off with and we are trying to get more. This was a sore point, even by the previous shadow, and I know the former member for Drysdale also felt that I was a bit sensitive in relation to this issue. I can confidently say that we are working towards addressing those problems out in those communities.

Ms CARNEY: For your information, I am not suggesting that you are not working. I just see a chasm between what actually is the truth and what was suggested and read by you in your statement on 24 August 2004, and I refer you back to it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was the truth.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement that you were 'optimistic about overcoming the abuse in remote communities'. Can you please advise what is the basis of that optimism, which I assume, in part, refers to the additional funding that you have provided but there is probably more to it than that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If we all stop being optimistic that one day there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and that we can work with communities and empower those communities to be able to deal with this issue

and provide them with the resources to deal with this - I remain optimistic, not just as a minister but a member working with those communities, that we can overcome these areas. To you, that might be the Pollyanna approach - you know, rose tinted glasses - that have gone dire and sad out there. Well, I will keep and stay optimistic that, whilst I am a member of government, I will ensure that we do work towards overcoming and working with those communities to overcome that problem.

Ms CARNEY: So you are a naturally optimistic sort of a politician?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is better than being embittered and sarcastic, don't you think? I think that some of us ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, I would not know.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Look, it does not hurt to stay optimistic.

Ms CARNEY: You said in your ministerial statement that notifications are increasingly coming from remote communities. Could you please provide a breakdown of the increase in notifications from remote communities?

Ms SCOTT: The data system which we have does not actually record it by community; we record it by our region that is receiving the report. Then the rest is by the notifier. It is not possible to pull it by community.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks for that. Minister, can you provide a breakdown based on the regions?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can we take that question on notice and we will get that information to you?

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: To follow the question on notice procedure, Leader of the Opposition, could you please restate that question?

Ms CARNEY: You said in your ministerial statement on 24 August 2004 that notifications are increasingly coming from remote communities. Could you please provide a breakdown of the regions?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated that she is willing to take that question on notice; that becomes question No 9.2.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I appreciate this question may need to be taken on notice also, as it relates to the one I have just asked. In relation to the notifications from the remote communities, or from the regions, I am interested to know what percentage of those notifications ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Is this the substantiation?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, you predicted accurately. I would like to know how many notifications ended up being substantiated.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: From that figure was substantiated over that period? We will try to get some of that information for you. Do you want to go back over that ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is another question on notice is it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is part of this ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Part of question No 9.2?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It was one question which we took on notice before. The second part of that question that was on notice then, was of the number of notifications, how many of those were substantiated?

Ms CARNEY: It is either the second part, or the second question. I do not think it matters much.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are getting some clarification so that you get the information this time, member for Araluen. We cannot break down, in terms of the notifications and how many of those notifications were then substantiated, by regions. However, we can give you a global figure. Say you had ...

Ms CARNEY: That will do.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... 1957, we can give you a broad number. If you want I can give you the second part of the question you were asking ...

Ms CARNEY: Can you give me all of the answer to the second part, or some of the answer to the second part?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I can give you all of the answer to the second part. In 2003-04, there were 1957 notifications, and in 2004-05, this is an estimate – is it year to date estimate, and projecting to the end of that year ...

Ms SCOTT: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, is this notifications?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This is notifications still.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. 2004-05.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In 2003-04, there were 1957; 2004-05 the projected estimate is 2050. Out of those notifications, 1072, or 55%, would go to investigations.

Ms CARNEY: Is that 1072 the figures for 2003-04?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, so that is 55% of that figure at the top. In 2004-05, we are projecting 1107, which is 54% of that total number going through to investigations. In terms of substantiations – maybe we should have done this the other way around; done the notifications and then the substantiations of what is going to go to investigate – in 2003-04, we had 527 and that was 52%, and in 2004-05, based on that estimate of 697 or 63%.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, in your statement you referred to 32 new operational staff who were joint Family and Community Services. Would you please provide details as to where those staff are located in terms of the region and the level of their employment?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have some. If you require further information I will pass it to Jenny Scott in regard to the breakdown of where those staff are. In 2004-05, there 61 new staff commenced in Family and Community Services. These staff filled existing and new positions within the program; so there were 61. In terms of the breakdown of where those staff are, I will hand it to the acting CEO, David Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I am able to provide that information by professional category for the total positions in 2004-05. At the P1 level there are 27 positions; at the P2 level there are 51 positions; Aboriginal Community Workers, 26 positions; AO6, Aboriginal Community Resource Workers, 4 positions; operational management and admin support, 44; policy and non-operational, 25; giving you a total of 177 positions.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, policy and non-operational?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Positions.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could you say the whole of that last sentence again?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The part before I said 177?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Policy and non-operational ...

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I will try to read it to her backwards. Policy – all I said was there were 25 positions in policy and non-operational.

Ms CARNEY: Of all the positions that you mentioned, how many of them are filled?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Currently, there are 23 vacancies.

Ms CARNEY: I am just a little confused. Perhaps nothing springs on it but if congratulations are in order I am happy to extend them to you, but in your statement you said there were 32 new operational staff to join Family and Community Services and the figure for 2004-05 is 61. Am I missing something or did you get lucky?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no. Some of those positions were vacant. All right? In the figures that the Acting CEO gave you before of the total number, 177; out of that 177, 61 staff commenced with FACS so that is in that last year. That includes the 32.

Ms CARNEY: Congratulations are not in ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think the congratulations are due to the department which has done a lot of work in recruitment.

Ms CARNEY: I agree with you. It is okay. Relax. I am just wanting to make sure that I am understanding it; but you said 32, but it is 61.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, 61, yes. Not the 177, that is existing staff. It is 61.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So that would be at the time you made your statement there were 32, but there is now. The penny has dropped.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Congratulations. You said in your statement and I quote: 'We are reviewing our family support programs to ensure that we are targeting our more vulnerable families'. Could you please provide details of those reviews and any outcomes and just let me know if they are in the budget papers. They do not seem to be but perhaps I have missed something.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, you can just answer it again. Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: I think earlier we were discussing the Family Support Framework and reviewing existing services, so I think that is the same.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I am just going through a summary of the minister's statement so, obviously, it was referred to on numerous occasions. Okay.

Minister, you said in your statement when you were talking about service provision, which was at page 24, that you would review service provision in such a way that, and I quote: '... strengthens communities and makes them safer places for children'. How have you made the communities - and identify which ones - safer for children?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Before I hand over to Jenny Scott, one of the areas is Gunbalanya where they have the Yingana project, which was working with women and some of the families to look at the protection of children. It is also an area that had a high number of volatile substance users. That is just one example of putting it in place. There has been a lot of work done through the women's centre and with the council to engage a youth worker and coordinate it, working with the women, to come up with that project and develop the resources that they had, including the school. The school was isolated.

The project at Gunbalanya adds to a potential model that you could work with other remote communities with the women's centre, council and, particularly, the schools that are usually left out of the equation. They are usually the places where you do have the captured audience of children between 8 am and 3 pm. That is one area and one project that I know is working and getting some good outcomes.

Ms SCOTT: The program to which the minister referred is one of a number that were funded through a small grants program that we have been delivering through NAPCAN - the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect - for small grants on communities and in community groups at the very grassroots level to raise awareness about child abuse, and to also implement programs that are about strengthening families. That program is going to be in its third year this financial year, 2005-06.

Also, through the Office of Children and Families, they have been doing some work with a number of communities similar to the sorts of things to which the minister referred. There is also a project about developing safety plans with families; a tool kit for families to use about safety planning for their children. The kinds of things being done are very much at the grassroots level with community groups rather than big services.

Ms CARNEY: How many communities have been made safer, do you think, or is it just an ongoing process?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is an ongoing process, member for Araluen. I have said that we will make communities safer, and we all hope that one day we will all have safe communities so that our kids will be safe.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in your statement you said that you had started to implement a series of measures that will improve the way children with disabilities are protected and families are supported to care for children. What are those series of measures?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: May I clarify this? Would this be better asked under Aged and Disability Services?

Ms CARNEY: In the same area, the minister also referred to funding to develop a video on sexual assault, so the statement ranged across quite an area. It is a matter for the minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I am just seeking clarification.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We can answer this or we can take it in the disabilities area. It was made in the context of, yes, children with disabilities are our most vulnerable and we will be putting in place measures. I have no problems with answering it now. It is better than deferring it until the next output. In terms of some of the measures that we have put in place, particularly some of the protocols that have been worked to deal with this issue of children with disabilities and the protection of them, I will hand to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: One of the most significant initiatives that we have undertaken is to work jointly with our disability program, so that we are jointly funding a service that will provide family-based care for children with disabilities so that the families do not have to place their children in the guardianship of the minister to access the service. That would be working to provide family-based care in partnership with the family. Also associated with that is a series of protocols between the disability program staff and the FACS staff so that, again, families can navigate that system more easily, rather than having half of their service happening through one program and then having to deal with other people for another part of the service for their child.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement that you would provide funding to develop a video on sexual assault which reflects community views. Can you please provide me with more information on that, including what sort of funding, where is the video going, who will see it, will it be in the form of a television ad as well as a video, and will it go to remote communities, urban centres and so on.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I believe that video has been done as far as I am aware. I did the foreword to that video. For further details of where it is at, I will hand to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: The video has been developed. It is still in that final production phase of crafting it in the right way. It has been done in partnership with communities in Central Australia, with Warlpiri media and some local songwriters and children in the area talking with elders about sexual assault. In terms of the latter part of the question about where it will be used in the future, that will depend a little on the community and how useful some of the messages are for beyond Central Australia. Obviously, the ability to transfer the message and work with them about that message being used elsewhere in the Territory would be our intention and that is their intention. We just have to work out those details.

Ms CARNEY: A separate video for the Top End or ...

Ms SCOTT: I understand there is some work happening through the Office of Crime Prevention about another piece of work in the Top End, so we are working with them about how compatible those are in terms of messages. I think we have slightly different messages but, essentially, they are about building up community resources that are local rather than using material that has been developed interstate, in the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement that you have reviewed contemporary practice models across Australia as well as completing a detailed analysis of our Northern Territory data. Could you please provide me with details of such analyses and what the results were?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of where we looked at this model came out of Adam Tomison's paper. Are you aware of Adam Tomison? He is a child protection expert. He has looked at many models within Australia, and he is working within the department at the moment. That paper is on the web, and if you would like a copy of that, in terms where we looked at some of this contemporary practice models both within Australia and overseas, we would certainly provide you with that paper, if you so ...

Ms CARNEY: No, I can look on the web by myself, thanks. You said that you had completed a detailed analysis of Northern Territory data. I would like to know the result of that detailed analysis.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We viewed contemporary models as well as completed the detailed analysis, which is contained within this paper.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so there is a paper on the web and you did not ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have had a look at that, and I have ...

Ms CARNEY: Can I finish the question, please. There was the paper on the web, and it was not the case that you undertook a detailed analysis of that paper; it is the case that the detailed analysis is on the web. Is that my ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no. I have a copy of this paper in my office. I have read this paper. I have not conducted a detailed analysis, but that is something that the department has undertaken in putting forward models. I have certainly seen and read Adam Tomison's paper. It is not just sitting on - it is on the web but I have read it and seen it. If you like further details and some analysis of it, I could certainly call Adam Tomison, who is in Child Protection, to come forward.

Ms CARNEY: No, thanks, minister. You said in your statement, and I quote: 'We have reviewed contemporary practice models across Australia, as well as completing a detailed analysis of our Northern Territory data'. I would like to know the result of that detailed analysis. I am interested you said that you - I do not know whether you meant 'you the person' or 'you the department'. You said just then that you had not completed the detailed analysis. Has it been done?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: 'We have reviewed' was in the statement. The statement did not say 'I have reviewed'.

Ms CARNEY: It said 'we', yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: 'We' as in the department. There is nothing wrong with the departmental review looking at those contemporary models. If you require some details of that analysis, I have no problems. If you want Adam to come forward and give you some details of that review, please ask.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Adam Tomison was commissioned to prepare this report prior to him being an employee of the department. He was commissioned for the report when he was working with the National Child Professional Clearing House. He is a well-respected professional in the area of child protection, and we would be very pleased to bring him up to the table to give the findings of his paper.

Ms CARNEY: He will be able to provide me the result of the detailed analysis?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Yes, he will, and you will also find that on the web as well.

Ms CARNEY: Okay so, in the interest of time, if you are saying that the results of that detailed analysis in their entirety are on the web, then I will look on the web. Thank you.

Minister, in your statement you said, and I quote: 'Our schools, police, Correctional Services, family support and Health staff are embracing their responsibilities to protect and care for children in difficulties'. How were they 'embracing' their legal obligations, and are you satisfied that they know what their statutory obligations are? What do you, as minister, do to ensure that they know about mandatory reporting?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Most schools are pretty much on the ball in their obligations with mandatory reporting. Protocols and agreements between FACS, the police and the Education Department - I have had discussions with the minister for Education on how we could do it better in the reporting that could be better between FACS and the education system. Those things are being worked on, but I will hand over to Jenny Scott to provide more detail with it.

Ms SCOTT: Yes, we provide training to all of the groups that you referred to on request, but also at the orientation for new teachers, new police officers, and nurses, those sorts of things. We are also reviewing our protocols with the Education Department, and had some discussions with them about the issues around reporting and feedback about teachers requesting more feedback. Also, we are reviewing our protocols to ensure that we get a better capture there of their needs, recognising in this part of the system and at the local level on a case-by-case basis, we introduce more of a case management/case conferencing model so that the relevant people involved are, in fact, involved early on in the process.

Ms CARNEY: So the department obviously would work very hard to ensure that not only departmental people but that all of the people to which minister referred in the statement well understand their responsibilities with mandatory reporting. Your program is to that effect?

Ms SCOTT: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you said in your statement gambling in communities must be addressed. I think you made some reference to how that could create difficulties for children at risk. Could you explain please how gambling has been addressed in the communities and whether there are any specific budgetary allocations for that purpose and the nature of special grants?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think some of these go across to RGL. I said gambling must be addressed and that is not saying that it has been addressed to date but it must be something that is looked at. We are looking, and it is something that has been talked about with the Commonwealth, which is the wider welfare reform. These are issues that communities have to start looking at because, whilst we talk about substance abuse and its impact on children, this is an area where there is very little recognition of the impact that gambling has in remote communities, particularly on the neglect of these children.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, it is fair to say that you have made my week. You have made my week because this was actually my speech that I was quoting from in reply to yours. For 11 months I have sought answers on your statement delivered on 24 August 2004 and, some 11 months later, I now have some. I did not think it would be that difficult to get straightforward answers in relation to a whole lot of information in a ministerial statement. Whilst I had been immensely dissatisfied with the estimates process, at least I have some answers to something. I thank you minister from the bottom of my heart. No more questions for that output group, Madam Deputy Chair.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am glad I have made the member for Araluen's week.

Ms CARNEY: It should not have to take 11 months. It is straightforward stuff.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, in response to that - and I am not trying to goad you or be provocative in any way - I clearly recall that letter. At the time, we were going through the reforms. I am not making excuses here. I was not prepared at that time to remove staff from the department from the reform. We had responded to that letter but I am glad that we have given you the information.

Ms CARNEY: But you said a whole lot of things and, surely like any minister, you do not just make it up as you go along ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, it is not about making that up, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: So you were playing funny buggers, that was it was all about ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Ms CARNEY: It was about 'How dare you question us ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, no.

Ms CARNEY: ... and we are not going to provide you with the information, Jodeen'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition ...

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is not.

Ms CARNEY: ... you have finally provided me with the information to which I am entitled.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not to get ...

Mrs Miller interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Order! Minister and Leader of the Opposition and member for Katherine, can I have a bit of quiet for a moment? Just for a moment. That will be good. I will not be ignored when I am calling order. The same procedures apply in this Estimates Committee as apply in the Assembly when I am chairing. When I call order, I do expect quiet. Minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am sorry if I was a bit provocative there.

Answer to Question

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The question on notice No 9.1 that I took for the member for Araluen about Karama Primary School and support services for family and communities. The member for Araluen asked if I could advise how this is going. In the answer to that, in June 2004, government provided \$140 000 to Karama Primary School Council to improve support services and facilities for families, with a focus on parenting assistance.

The funding was to be used by July 2007. Funding was to produce a consulted community action plan for children and families, training for people working with families in the local area to support a more cohesive service delivery, parenting resource materials and physical space to provide a base for children and family activities.

The school has been working hard with the school community. A project plan has been developed and a part-time project officer has been recruited. It is anticipated that the project will commence delivery of programs in 2005-06.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We have another question on this Output 3.3, Child Protection Services, from the member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: I would like to make the comment that I am pleased that the member for Araluen is pleased with her answers to a statement that was made 12 months ago, but there are some of us sitting on the sidelines who wish the process would be speedier.

Minister, when schools report cases of children at risk, is there a response time, and is there a procedure for follow-up times? I am aware of cases where people have been frustrated because although the department has been contacted, it does not seem as though the response occurs for some time and follow-ups often do not occur. I know of cases where children seem to have disappeared off the map. Is there a procedure set down by the department that they will react?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We have all heard those frustrations with that from people. So that you get that information, member for Braitling, I will ask the director, Jenny Scott, to provide a response about that process.

Ms SCOTT: The response does vary and I am aware that some teachers and preschools are concerned about the lack of feedback they have. The response can vary because the circumstances are often varied. Whilst there is a process internally, what is not in the current protocol with the Education Department is a feedback loop to teachers. That is the issue I referred to before when I said we are reviewing the protocol with Education because that is what they have asked for. That will be one that refers to when it is appropriate to provide information to schools, even if that is only to say the case is being acted

upon as against being able to give them full information because sometimes that is not possible, given the circumstances of the family.

Mrs BRAHAM: It is very important that you keep schools informed, particularly as we are talking about children who are often at risk and that communication should be part of your protocols so that schools are kept informed. Minister, that would relieve a lot of the frustration of teachers.

Speaking about the Alice Springs area, a number of children who are considered at risk are picked up by Night Patrol and the police. They are returned home or to relatives but, in some cases, there is nowhere for them to be returned. Where do they take them?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is a good question, member for Braitling. It is an important area and I will hand over to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: Again, it does depend somewhat on the needs of the child. You have referred to family members and to home. Where those options are not available, we sometimes use foster carers and sometimes they are Aboriginal foster carers. We also have an arrangement with and fund a service at Tangentyere, for families that work with us to provide safe accommodation. We also place children, on occasions, with the Anglicare service that we fund as well. But you are right, it is an area of need that we are working on.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, would you be prepared to look at some solution for the short-term accommodation needs of these children?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is something that we are committed to doing. Part of the funding that we have earmarked for the VSA was going to look at a safe house concept, not just for the issue of VSA but also looking at the service needs of children in the category that is being picked up. That is happening. There is a bit more thought and detail that needs to go into it before we move to that next step.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do we have alternative accommodation in Darwin for the children?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is Darwin and Alice Springs that we are looking at.

Mrs BRAHAM: Some two years ago, there was a campaign in Alice Springs to recruit more indigenous people to act as foster parents. As you are probably aware, there was concern that they did not want Aboriginal children placed with non-indigenous families. It was my understanding that was not highly successful. How many Aboriginal families do you actually have as foster families who can take on that role in Alice Springs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is something that has always been a big issue, but one of the things that we tried to maintain under the *Community Welfare Act* is the Aboriginal child placement principle and, at all times, certainly with the placement of children, ensure that that happens. However, there are times when you are not going to. I am trying to find just some of those statistics so that you get some idea of where we have had numbers of Aboriginal children who have come into that category, and how many of those we have tried to place with Aboriginal families under that OCP key principle.

There are around 75 of the total number of Aboriginal children in care with non-Aboriginal carers. Some of it is because we cannot get indigenous carers, some of it is that those Aboriginal children who have come into care have quite severe disabilities and behavioural problems that it is hard to place them with another Aboriginal family to be able to cope with this issue. I will get that verified to ensure that that number that I have given you is the right one.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: We are waiting on Jenny Scott, who is manually collating that number for you right now, the number of families, so we will have it to you in a number of seconds.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: All right. While that manual collation occurs ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I have one last question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I was going to propose a five minute break.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. If I can just run this through, because it is associated with it. For some of the grandmothers who often take in children, it is a costly business, even if it is only overnight. I am talking

about feeding them, bathing and, perhaps, clothing them and giving them breakfast in the morning. Is there some way they can be assisted financially? Perhaps they may then reconsider continuing this role. I know some of them have backed off because of the financial burden it places upon them, particularly when they are suddenly dumped with six kids.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I agree. As in other jurisdictions, not all relative or kinship carers receive this support. However, where the child is in custody or under the guardianship of the minister by virtue of the *Community Welfare Act*, relatives or carers do receive that financial and other support, as if they were unrelated foster carers. Unlike some of the jurisdictions, the Northern Territory does provide some one-off support to those carers to established and informal kinship care placement, if that placement is in the child's best interest and FACS have been involved with the child and the family.

The issue of financial support to kinship carers – and I know that it is on a national agenda with the Community Services and Disability ministers. It is a national issue, particularly in relation to grandparents and the role of grandparents when they become the carers. Can I just go back to ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I am just raising it with you and making you aware that there are, perhaps, times when it needs to be addressed.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When we were talking before, member for Brainting, when you asked the question about Aboriginal children ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ...in the nine months to March 2005, when I said I would just get some of those numbers for you: 289 Aboriginal and Islander children had an episode of care in the Northern Territory. Of these, only 75 were placed - I knew I had read 75 somewhere - with non-Aboriginal carers, so that is 26% of that total. As I said, for many of these children their high behavioural or disability-related needs dictated their placement options and, in many cases, Aboriginal kinship carers could not be found to provide the level of care and support that they required. That was the reason for that.

Mrs BRAHAM: But there is an ongoing campaign to gather more foster parents?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. As of 30 May 2005, we have about 20 registered Aboriginal foster carers in Central Australia. Bear in mind that this is a manual count we are working through, but we can get better, accurate data once we have confirmed. There are about 20. You can never stop, and I know that there have been a lot of regular ads that get taken out in all of the local newspapers calling for people to become registered carers, because you can never get enough carers.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, minister. That is okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There being no further questions, that concludes consideration for this output group.

Answers to Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Before we have a short break, I will table questions taken on notice by the Minister for Health. Questions 4.15 to 4.20 are being tabled in response to questions taken on notice. By my computer clock, it is 9.08 pm, so we will come back in at 9.15 pm.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – AGED AND DISABILITY SERVICES

Output 4.1 – Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Aged and Disability Services, Output 4.1, Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability has had a small increase in the budget from \$49 639m to \$49 933m, an increase of \$294 000, or put differently, an increase of less than 1%. That does not cover CPI. Can you advise what, if any, services will be cut to make up for this funding shortfall?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to your question, there is actually an additional \$1.5m in 2005-06, and I will go through that. You will see, amongst other things, increased respite to older carers under an agreement between all jurisdictions, and this increase is offset in the final figures by two lots of Commonwealth funds. The first part is \$1.2m which we received late in 2004, and rolled over from 2003-04 to 2004-05, and \$0.3m in additional Commonwealth funding received in 2004-05. If you are seeking more details apart from those two, I will hand over to the Acting CEO, David Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The first point I would make is that the original budget for 2004-05 was \$46.859m, and there were substantial on-offs, which ended up with an end of year revised budget of \$49.639m. The additional \$294 000 for the output of Community Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability is arrived at as a result of a number of on-offs. I will list those for you: a substantial expansion of NT-funded initiatives or program expansion to the tune of \$1.689m; additional CPI wages and funding growth of \$689 000; reviewed service mapping and overhead allocation, \$398 000; additional Australian government funded programs, \$193 000; carry forward of Australian government funded programs from 2004-05 to 2005-06, \$156 000; the offset was a reduction in one-off externally-funded projects of minus-\$15 000; reallocation of services to meet service demands, minus-\$133 000; reduction in Australian government funded programs, minus-\$1.076m; carry forward of Australian government funded programs from 2003-04 into 2004-05 of \$1.607m. The combination of the ons and offs there gives you a plus-\$294 000 of 2005, which is in 2005-06 budget of \$49.933m

Ms CARNEY: The 0.59% increase in that first budget for Support Services for Frail Aged People and People with a Disability is somewhat concerning. There is less than \$300 000. In Budget Paper No 3 on page 28, I note that the expectation is that demand for services will increase to the tune of 95 000 more hours of community support services. How will you pay for this increase, given the comment on page 128 of Budget Paper No 3 that these client services were, and I quote; '... previously included in Community Health Services'?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I can see with Budget Paper No 3, page 128, it is from 375 000 hours which was the estimate, to 470 000 hours, an increase of hours of client's measure. As I understand it, there has been limited data available when calculating the original 2004-05 estimates, or a calculation error was made in determining original targets. That estimate was subsequently revised to provide further details, with that error and the integrity of – I will pass over to Acting CEO, David Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I need to make the point that with the 0.5% increased estimate we are talking about output appropriation rather than program expenditure. It is to draw the assumption of service or limited growth on the figures that were provided, is not a correct statement.

An explanation of the growth from 375 000 hours in 2004-05 to a growth of 470 000 hours in 2005-06 is explained by the expected increase in HAAC funding released in the fourth quarter of 2004-05, which will be continued in 2005-06, resulting in increased activity.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I am skipping some questions in the interest of time. Minister, I am advised that taxi vouchers provided for frail-aged people and people with disability cannot be used for medical appointments. Instead, people who cannot drive have to use Mission Australia's bus. Do you know anything about that, and is it true?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That people who cannot drive ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, they cannot use taxi vouchers for medical appointments. It is information that people provided to us, so I thought it was appropriate to put forward.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Anyone who has that eligibility usually gets those taxi vouchers ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that is what I thought.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... has access to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme. I cannot recall any complaints which I have had otherwise of that. We have had some regular correspondence from people in relation to the Taxi

Subsidy Scheme, but no one who cannot access it and, therefore, they have to use the Mission Australia vehicle. From an operational level, I will hand over to the Assistant Secretary, Rose Rhodes.

Ms RHODES: The scheme is designed to assist people who have a disability and prevent them from using public transport to access the community. However, in addition, the department also used HAAC to fund additional transport services through Mission Australia to carry our clients as well.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I am conscious of the member for Braiting as well as my own colleagues.

Minister, your government promised, as a 2001 election commitment, to establish one-stop disability resource centres in Darwin and Alice Springs by co-locating existing services more sensibly. Can you bring us up to speed as to whether that is happening?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, that has not happened. It is something which we are looking at, particularly in Central Australia where we are looking at integrating some of the services there to create better access to Aged and Disability Services with Family and Community Services overall. So if we look at Darwin we have gone some way down the path in terms of integrating some of the services in Central Australia.

Ms CARNEY: Do you think it will happen? Is there a time frame for making it happen?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, there is no time frame. I am well aware that it was something that was promised in 2001 and that is something that we have been looking at and taking quite seriously. However, we have not met the date but it is something that we are committed to looking at. We will continue to look at its viability and how that service will be placed.

Ms CARNEY: Your government promised as a 2001 election commitment that, from within existing public housing stock, a trial of a village-style unit complex in Darwin would be undertaken to assist people with a profound or severe disability to live independently with on-site support and, if that was successful, other centres would be created. What has happened to that promise?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am going to have to take that on notice, member for Araluen.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Question on notice. Restate the question please.

Ms CARNEY: Your government promised as a 2001 election commitment that, from within existing public housing stock, it would trial a village-style unit complex in Darwin to assist people with a profound or severe disability to live independently with on-site support and, if that was successful, centres would be created in other areas. What has happened to that promise?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has stated that she will take that as a question on notice. That becomes question No 9.3.

Ms CARNEY: Your government promised as a 2001 election commitment to develop a three-year strategic plan to meet the needs of disabled Territorians, their families and their carers. Can you advise what has happened with that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are just getting some of those answers for you. I will take that one on notice as well, as to where we are up to with those 2001 election commitments that you are talking about.

Question on Notice

Ms CARNEY: I will restate the question. Your government promised as a 2001 election commitment to develop a three-year strategic plan to meet the needs of disabled Territorians, their families and their carers. Can you tell me what has happened with that?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated she will take that as a question on notice. It becomes question No 9.4.

Ms CARNEY: Another question which I am sure would have been interest to the member for Braitling, given her commitment to Alice Springs. I understand a number of submissions have gone to your government seeking the employment of a rehabilitation specialist in Alice Springs. I understand that there is no rehabilitation specialist. Does one exist in Central Australia? If not, why not?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand it, this is an acute output. Rehab, depending which part of the rehab, that this is not part of our output. But I will just get some clarification on that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Rehabilitation falls under acute. It falls under the portfolio responsibility of the Minister for Health so you would have had to have asked minister Toyne that question.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Well, I could write a letter.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You can write a letter.

Ms CARNEY: I will write a letter and come back to it next estimates. That concludes that output, thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I just ask the minister who is responsible for the frail, the aged and the disability people who live in town camps?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I suppose we are unless that is under the responsibility of say, in Alice Springs it would be Tangentyere, in Tennant Creek, Julalikari. But I would say Tangentyere would be funded through the department to provide those services.

Mrs BRAHAM: I was just wondering what role the department plays in monitoring that.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will have that confirmed, member for Braitling. As far as I know, Tangentyere is funded to provide a level of service. For what support we give, I will defer to Rose Rhodes.

Ms RHODES: The people living in town camps, if they have a disability or any service requirement, will be assessed in the same way any other individual is assessed. If they require services, there are some individualised packages that we package up for special needs people, so they can access a range of packages. It could be aged care packages or packages that help them maintain normal daily living within their community. We provide some funding to NGOs to provide these sorts of services.

Mrs BRAHAM: Perhaps, minister, I could talk to you later about this.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If there are no further questions on consideration of Output 4.1, that concludes consideration of this output.

Output 4.2 – Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 4.2, Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, the 2005-06 budget sees a cut of \$362 000 to the Pensioner Concession Scheme, in Budget Paper No 3 at page 122, yet it is predicted that an extra 700 recipients will join the scheme during 2005-06. How will concessions on items such as rates, car registration, water bills and interstate travel remain unchanged, given this cut in funding?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Budget 2005 continues its strong support for senior Territorians. The apparent decrease in Budget Paper No 3 is a technical issue only and, again, relates to that waiting exercise conducted each year whereby corporate service costs are realigned against output groups. I will hand over to the Acting CEO who can go through where those issues are.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, minister, and I await the answer, but could you just repeat – I am intrigued by this relatively new word of 'waiting'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Waiting?

Ms CARNEY: I did not quite take down what you said because I would like the definition. You said 'waiting is where corporate costs are realigned against output groups'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: '... conducted each year whereby corporate services costs are realigned against output groups'. We can provide an explanation of that variation for you.

Ms CARNEY: I am conscious of time, but because it is a significant variation of \$362 000, and given that we are in estimates, yes, I should have that explanation, thank you.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Once again, I feel the need to reiterate that there will be no service reduction at the end of this calculation. You are correct to say there is a reduction in the output of minus-\$362 000. However, to arrive at that I need to point out that there has been an additional \$587 000 for CPI, wages and funding growth, an additional \$40 000 from Australian government funded programs, \$30 000 for NT-funded initiatives or program expansion, plus \$5000 for additional one-off externally funded projects. This is offset by reallocation of resources to meet service demands of \$125 000, reviewed service mapping and overhead allocation of \$415 000 - and that is the previous explanation I gave about movement of outputs; and the reallocation of corporate resources to meet service demands of minus-\$484 000. The summation of that is a minus-\$362 000, which takes you to \$8.692m. It is a technical offset, and there is a real growth in that budget which allows the growth in services which you have just described.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. It does not actually mean a lot to me, and I am not having a go at you when I say that. I doubt that it will mean much to any senior Territorian who may be interested enough to read the budget. I indicate, minister, I may end up getting a briefing from Treasury about these terms called matching and waiting and what it all means. Thank you anyway at least it is on the *Hansard*. That concludes my questions for this output area.

Mrs BRAHAM: August is Senior Citizens Month. There have been a number of applications for grants for Seniors Month. I believe there is a panel of three who decide on what applications will be successful. No one on that panel was from Alice Springs. When are you going to announce those grants? My concern is that the culture in the town of senior citizens was not as well known to those people who were on the panel. Perhaps this would have been useful to them, because there are many organisations which apply and have been advised they were not successful which has caused a little angst in the town. Could you tell me when you will advise the public of those successful applications?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. Part of this is in my role as Minister assisting the Chief Minister with Senior Territorians. Some of those letters and applications have just arrived. Because of the recent elections and going into caretaker mode, and the caretaker convention being in place, no one has been able to sign off on it. That is why there are some of those delays. However, I will get back to you and try to get those letters and who was successful in that list.

Mrs BRAHAM: There is about three weeks to go to the start of Seniors Month. These people who have been successful may have organisations that require this funding fairly quickly.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We will get that done. I can endeavour to give you some information if you like.

Mrs BRAHAM: And if you have any extra small money ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Coins?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions on that output? That concludes consideration of this output group.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES **Output 5.1 - Mental Health Services.**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 5.0, Mental Health Services, Output 5.1, Mental Health Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: The latest Department of Health Annual Report 2003-04, page 132, notes that occupied bed days combined for Alice Springs and Darwin hospital, hospital-based beds and health units, to have been for that year 10 069. That is the most up-to-date published figure reflecting the demand on in-patient services. The new budget predicts that figure will increase to 12 800. Minister, how are you going to provide for this extra demand at our hospitals?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Some of those estimates are based on a range of values rather than specific figures to allow for the variations due to case complexity factors. With the case mix adjustments it is not available in Mental Health. The growth in activity in 2004-05 has exceeded the trend over the past five years. In terms of the occupied bed growth by designated services - I believe that is what you were just asking with that - the increases in 2004-05 and 2005-06, occupied bed days estimates are due to substantial growth in in-patient separations and bed day variances directly related to this increase. Is that satisfactory? In terms of when you are looking at that performance measure, you asked where it is going up to 4800. Can you just repeat ...

Ms CARNEY: I will ask another question which is in relation to it. I will read the *Hansard*, I guess, because it is getting late. The 2003-04 annual report at page 12 said, and I quote:

In-patient separations for mental health patients rose by over 20% during the year compared to the original estimate, with occupied bed days some 15.8% higher than anticipated at budget time.

Minister, given the 15.8% blow-out in the demand for mental health service in 2003-04, can you be confident that your current prediction of up to 12 800 bed days is accurate; if so, why?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Again, we went to that. I will endeavour to answer some of it, but I would also hand part of it over to the Acting CEO to go through some of the facts. For what you were just asking, there is a total of 32 approved in-patient beds in the Territory; 26 beds in the Top End Mental Health Services - that is the TEMHS in-patient unit; and there are six in the CAMHS (Central Australia Mental Health Services) unit.

A number of modifications to facilities in both Darwin and Alice Springs have been made to improve the environment and enhance safety and quality of care. Recruitment and retention of permanent and casual staff has increased to reduce reliance on agency staff and improved continuity of care. Measures have been put in place to stabilise the demand for in-patient beds and ensure consumers are linked with the clinical and support services that they need post-discharge. New sub-acute service options will provide an alternative to in-patient admissions where appropriate, and provide intensive post-discharge follow-up. It is anticipated these new services will also assist in managing demand for acute in-patient beds.

Although the demand for in-patient services fluctuates throughout the year, the overall trend data indicates a steady increase in in-patient activity over the last four years. In 2004-05, the increase in separation was in the order of 10%, with a corresponding increase in bed days. The difference of \$142 000 between the published budget for 2004-05, and the estimate for 2004-05, is due to reallocation of resources to meet service demand. I suppose separation in the Alice is that 10%.

Ms CARNEY: In the 2003-04 annual report for the Mental Health Review Tribunal, Hugh Bradley, Chief Magistrate, who is the president, stated:

The number of determinations made by the tribunal increased this year by approximately 14%. The strain on the resources of the magistracy, therefore, still continues with no immediate resolution in sight.

What do you think a statement like this means, and what do you think are the ramifications of this strain on mental health clients in the Northern Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, just to clarify - and I did not quite understand your question. Part of the question that you asked seemed as if it was related to Minister for Justice and Attorney-General's portfolio, rather than the Community ...

Ms CARNEY: No. The president of the Mental Health Review Tribunal, who happens to be the Chief Magistrate, Hugh Bradley, said, and quoted the annual report - sorry he is the president of Mental Health Tribunal. He said: 'The number of determinations made by the tribunal ...' - that is Mental Health Tribunal - '... increased this year by approximately 14%. The strain on the resources of the magistracy, therefore, still continues with no immediate resolution in sight'.

My question is: what do you think a statement like that means? What do you think of the ramifications of the strain as identified by the president of the tribunal? What do you think are the ramifications of that strain on mental health clients?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the Director of Mental Health Services, Ms Bronwyn Hendry.

Ms HENDRY: The increase in determinations would be directly related to the increase in separations because the tribunal's role is to review people who are involuntarily detained under the *Mental Health Act*. You always have a proportion of people who are involuntarily detained and if you increase separations and then you will increase those numbers.

I am not quite sure what you mean in how the increase on demand for the tribunal's resources relates to an increased strain for mental health patients. Each mental health patient would get reviewed individually. I agree that that is an increase demand for the tribunal but I do not think it would necessarily relate to an increased strain on mental patients.

Ms CARNEY: I guess, put simply, it could refer to delays in matters being heard.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If I can just clarify, member for Araluen, the Mental Health Review Tribunal does sit within the Justice portfolio. We can deal with the mental health funding issues, part of the question that you are asking. Correct me if I am wrong. Is that what you are ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, perhaps if you do not have ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am just trying to get some facts so we can get on with answering your question.

Ms CARNEY: The number of mental health patients appearing before the tribunal has increased by 14%, which I would have thought is significant. I am interested in what you think it means and what the ramifications are, if any, on such a strain as identified by the president of the Mental Health Tribunal. You might say it is not Australian and it does not mean anything to mental health patients.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is what I am just trying to ascertain, to get some clarity of what you have asked so that we can answer. That is what I am saying, regarding what we are going to do about some of the new money. The things that we are doing or working towards with the new funding or the funding that has been earmarked for 2004-05 is to significantly increased clinical rehabilitation services. It is just not to prisoners with mental illness, acquired brain injury and/or intellectual disability. This initiative will create approximately five full-time positions across the Mental Health and Disability Service program in 2005-06, and an estimated nine positions by 2007-08. One of the things that is coming out of that, and certainly needs to be done, is a needs analysis which will be conducted in collaboration with the Department of Justice to determine the best staffing mix to deal with some of the issues that came out of what Hugh Bradley was talking about.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. On 15 November last year, Magistrate David Loadman, as reported in the *Northern Territory News*, called on you, as minister, to develop a mental health facility for people who cannot look after themselves and were considered to be a danger to their community. His comments came after he had to send someone to gaol because there was nowhere else to send him. Do you think that is a satisfactory situation and, if not, what do you propose to do about it? Sorry, it was Magistrate Daynor Trigg, I think, if that makes a difference.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. This should have come under the People with a Disability output. This is part of the unfit to plead category. We could move that to the non-specific outputs, if you like.

Ms CARNEY: With respect, it is not ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no. I am just talking through my paperwork. I will answer it for you, but it is part of the unfit to plead.

Ms CARNEY: I am happy to hand you the article, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, I know that. However, I will get the Acting CEO, David Ashbridge, just to go through that area.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: In 2005-06 – and I will be passing on to the Director for Mental Health – there is a \$500 000 activity allocation for community-based support, plus \$350 000 for in-reach prisoners. The critical fact around this particular issue is that the *Criminal Code Amendment Act 2002* commenced operation on 15 June 2002.

There are 26 people who have either sought or are currently seeking to utilise the provisions of the *Criminal Code*; 18 cases have reached conclusions with the courts and the summation of that are three

individuals have been placed on custodial supervision orders; four individuals have been placed on non-custodial supervision orders; and the provisions of the legislation were found not to apply to six individuals. Three cases were released unconditionally and charges were dropped in two cases. Eight cases have not yet reached conclusion in the courts. Of the 26 clients who have tested their cases under these provisions, nine are disability clients.

Services are currently provided in the Darwin Correctional Centre on an in-reach basis by the forensic mental health team. No Disability Support Services are currently available. Discussions are under way between Disability and Mental Health to set up an appropriate model and staffing mix, which will support people with disabilities.

As a result of the joint proposal from Health and Community Services and Justice to enhance mental health and disability clinical and behavioural support services within the NT Correctional Services at a cost of \$350 000 in the first year 2005-06, increasing to \$700 000 ongoing from 2007-08. This funding is in the mental health budget and is pending a decision as to what quota will be moved to Aged and Disability to provide for its in-reach program. An additional \$500 000 has been provided to meet the needs of the unfit to plead in the community.

Ms CARNEY: We are pushed for time, and I will apologise to the member for Brainting and my colleagues, but I really cannot cull the following three questions because they are terribly important.

Last year on 29 October, an article appeared in the *Northern Territory News* - and I have a copy of it I am happy to give to you - explaining how your government is going to establish high-security treatment centres at Darwin and Alice Springs goals for prisoners with mental disorders. The article said, and I quote: 'It is planned to build a distinct group of 12 to 20 cells at both jails'. Other details were provided such as offices and therapy rooms and so on. When will these centres be completed and have they been started?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There was a recent review of adult custodial services in the Northern Territory and part of that review recommended that - you are asking under these areas but the responsibility of a lot of that is under the Department of Justice, but I will see if this answers your question - the services pursue negotiations with the Department of Health and Community Services to further develop those concepts of small specialised, secure, mental health units both in Darwin and Alice Springs Correctional Services. As far as I am aware, in my department's point of view, those negotiations are progressing. The lead agency on that is Justice.

Ms CARNEY: However, of course, it relates to your portfolio in the obvious way. I assume that the *Northern Territory News* received background information from either your department - probably your department - or Justice. I guess the follow-up question is why would anyone promote these sorts of centres in October last year if there is really no intention of doing it for the foreseeable future.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There is a commitment to look at that ...

Ms CARNEY: Just to look at it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, to do this. The Acting CEO just spoke before of the joint proposal between Health and Community Services and the Department of Justice - who is the lead agency in relation to this issue - to enhance that mental health and disability clinic and behavioural support services within those Correctional centres. In 2005-06, there is \$350 000 that has been earmarked in the first year, which will increase to \$700 000 per annum ongoing from 2007-08.

Ms CARNEY: 2007-08? No doubt there will be more articles in the *Northern Territory News*.

Earlier this year, in February in fact, there was a coronial inquest into a well-known person in Alice Springs. I am sure you have been provided with the Coroner's recommendations, which I have read as well. The Coroner said that mental health care needs a shake-up. When this person died in the unit, staffing ratios were at what the Coroner described as 'last resort levels'. Why did staffing levels fall to such a sorry state in that unit?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am aware of that coronial inquest, member for Araluen. Although the Coroner made no adverse findings, a number of recommendations did come forward relating to the environment, staffing and clinical practices in the Central Australian Mental Health Services In-patient Unit, and they were contained in the final report. Since then, CAMHS has conducted a critical incident review, and I will hand over to the Assistant Secretary of Community Services to provide some further information in relation to

this. Through that review, that certainly addressed many of the recommendations prior to the coronial inquest. Having visited there, by all reports CAMHS has since progressed all outstanding actions to do with that review and associated with this matter. The coronial investigation has been of assistance in reviewing and refining the existing observation policy, recruitment and retention of staff, and the other safety and quality issues in the CAMHS In-patient Unit.

In relation to what you asked about whether it should have got to this level, it should not have. All of those recommendations have been taken on board and we have implemented all of them. I can hand this to ...

Ms CARNEY: No, that is fine, thank you. If I need some follow-up information I will write a letter. Can I ask you a question that arises from your answer, however? You have conceded that, no, the staffing levels should not have dropped that low. Prior to the coronial inquest, and prior to this man taking his own life - a man I knew well, I might say - did you know that the staffing levels were at 'last resort levels', or did you, as minister, only find out after this man took his life?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I was not aware at any time, member for Araluen. I am not going to get into individual cases, and I know you do not want that. That is not the issue which is being discussed here. No is the answer to your question.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for your honesty. I understand that Mental Health In-patient Units at both Royal Darwin and Alice Springs Hospitals are often overcrowded. Last year, the Australian Nurses Federation went public about this matter, and I am sure you will recall the heading of the article: 'Patients sleep on ward floors claim'. Given the increase of more than 2500 extra hospital beds predicted by your budget in 2005-06, what has been done to increase the number of beds in both of those units?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The growth funding and some of the new funding which has gone into that area will be to establish sub-acute or step-down 24-hour residential services, and that will be approximately 14 beds in Darwin, and also Alice Springs to pick up some of those areas where the demand is increasing. That \$1.8m includes about \$1.2m in capital and \$600 000 in 2005-06, increasing to \$1.1m recurrent thereafter for those two sub-acute areas. We are looking at a number of areas, and I will pass to the Assistant Secretary of Community Services, Rose Rhodes.

Ms RHODES: Although the demand for the in-service patient can fluctuate from time to time, it is not a complete overall full occupancy or over-occupancy. Certainly, the trend has been increasing in the past four years. The Northern Territory is one of the jurisdictions that does not have a step-down facility, therefore, the in-patient facility has been accommodating people who could have moved to a step-down facility. The establishment of 14 beds for step-down facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin will alleviate the overcrowding in the current in-patient facilities.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. A point of clarification: is it 14 beds in Darwin and Alice Springs?

Ms RHODES: It is 14 beds combined.

Ms CARNEY: Combined?

Ms RHODES: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can you break that down. That is probably what she is probably going to ask me. It is 8 in Darwin and 6 in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: In the interests of time, I will not ask any more questions in that output area.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any more questions? There being no further questions on output 5.1, that concludes consideration of the output group. We thank the officers for their time.

Answers to Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will table response to questions taken on notice during the Estimates Committee hearings for the Minister for Business and Industry. The responses are to questions 5.1 to 5.4.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 - PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES
Output 6.3 - Alcohol and Other Drugs

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Public Health Services, Output 6.3 Alcohol and Other Drugs. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: There are, Madam Deputy Chair. There are a bundle of questions and I know that departmental officers have been sitting here for hours. I do not like to disappoint anyone; however, I have people breathing down my neck in ways which you will never know.

A Member: Good!

Ms CARNEY: There were a number of questions to be asked in sequence, so I am so terribly sorry but for reasons I have outlined I will forego asking my questions in this area. But no doubt you have had an entertaining evening.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That completes consideration of this output group.

Answer to Question

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Madam Deputy Chair, there was a question on notice, No 9.4, for the member for Araluen who asked government promised in 2001 to develop – do you remember that? The question was what has happened to the plan.

A draft Aged and Disability Services framework has been developed by the department and is in the process of further development with the Disability Advisory Council. The council has requested, and has had, significant input in its further development. The draft framework has been resubmitted to the department for revision and is now with the council for final consideration. Hopefully, once the Disability Advisory Council has considered, it we can release that framework.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister thank you for that answer on question 9.4. We have duly noted that.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any other non output specific budget related questions? No.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the officers who have provided advice to the minister for attending today.

A note from the scheduled minister that you are now available to take questions on environment and heritage that sits within the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment.

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I invite the member to introduce the officials accompanying her and if she wishes to make an opening statement.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, I would, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. I would like to introduce Sarah Butterworth, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment, and Lyn Allen, Executive Director of the Office of Environment and Heritage. I would like to just make some brief introductory comments.

As Minister for Environment and Heritage, the Office of Environment and Heritage reports to me. As such, I have responsibility for the outputs under Environment and Heritage in Budget Paper No 3; namely Environmental Protection Services, Heritage, Conservation Services and Greenhouse Policy.

Within my portfolio, apparent negative variations affect each output. Let me make it clear that these do not amount to budget cuts or cuts to service. The changes put forward in the budget papers reflect the amounts carried forward to the 2004-05 budget from 2003-04 plus some adjustments to departmental overheads. In particular, the negative variation in the environment protection services can be attributed to additional funding over \$151 000 offset by reductions of \$313 000.

The 2004-05 allocation included one-off funding of \$100 000 to develop a stormwater strategy for Darwin Harbour. The \$162 000 reduction includes \$97 000 for grants carried through from 2003-04 and \$100 000 grants funds transferred to the Greenhouse and Heritage outputs within the office. They were, in essence, internal and administrative variations. The variations in Heritage Conservation Services of \$18 000 is comprised of additional funding of \$114 000 offset by reductions of \$132 000.

The 2004-05 allocations included one-off funding of \$100 000 to undertake a cultural sites identification project for Darwin Harbour, and grants funds of \$85 000 that was carried forward from 2003-04. An additional \$50 000 was transferred for heritage-related grants within the global office budget.

Again, I say that these variations did not amount to cuts; they are standard administrative variations. Base funding to these outputs have been maintained. I look forward to answering your questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions on the minister's opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: You look like you are not very worried about me, Marion; it is that man over there.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Questions on the opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: No, no questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Output 2.1 – Environmental Protection Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay we will move to output specific questions. I will now call for questions on Output Group 2.0, Environment and Heritage, Output 2.1, Environmental Protection Services.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what will it cost to establish an EPA and what departmental implications are there?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The estimated cost of establishing and operating the EPA have yet to be determined, but will be a critical factor in decisions about models to be adopted in the Northern Territory.

The audit and assessment are being undertaken within the existing resources of Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment, not from within the OEH budget. A team of senior staff have been taken offline to conduct the audit, and that estimated cost is in the order of about \$160 000 for the period from June to October 2005.

Mrs MILLER: How many senior staff are you going to second from the departments to work on the EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Three.

Mrs MILLER: Three.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is for the establishment of it.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. How many permanent appointments will be made to the EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, member for Katherine, I will just work through going from FACS to Environment and Heritage. Part of the announcement was that a staged approach will be adopted as part of moving towards an EPA. Certainly, extra staff and resources are to be put in place in the financial year 2007-08 at around \$248 000, and a further \$876 000 allocated in 2008-09, which will enable a total of eight additional staff to be employed.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Will the EPA be run by a board?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: It will be a board?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We did say that as part of our election commitment that an EPA will have an independent board.

Mrs MILLER: How many board members will there be?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Three or four.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have not said anything.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: She is playing with her nails, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: How are you going to go about getting the relevant people onto this board? How are you going to choose the board members?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: One of the things that has to be done regarding part of the work that we have to do with moving towards an EPA, is to look at the detail of the legislative framework. That will determine the powers of the board and how that board will operate, how many members it will be comprised of. There is a bit of detail and work that needs to be done to look at that whole development. How many board members? You do not want something that is bigger than Ben Hur. You could have four or five members but, again, that is something – and the process of electing or appointing those powers under that legislation, all of that will need to be worked out, and some of that work has been looked at. The Sessional Committee on Environment and Sustainability - I hope I have got that right - did look at a number of models throughout Australia: how those various models worked, the make-up of those boards and the powers of those boards. We will look at that. Part of that detail is taking those reports, disseminating them and getting that information and coming up with an EPA that is the best for the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Obviously, if it is still in that very early stage, you do not have any idea at this particular point in time how often that board would meet?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, there was ...

Mrs MILLER: You have not got that far?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No. Some of that is part of the details. That is detail that needs to be worked out when we get a board. There would be requirements. If you put this board under an act, there would be requirements under the act for the board to meet at certain times. It could be four times a year.

Mrs MILLER: Do you envisage a chairman of this board to be paid a salary?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Again, that is part of the details that need to be worked out in terms of salary. I think most of the councils that we have presently, under the Remuneration Tribunal there is allocation for chairs to be paid as I understand it. Yes. So there is a set rate under the Remuneration Tribunal.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. I think you have answered that one. Is there a budget allocation to address the implementation of the EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I thought I gave you those figures earlier on when I went ...

Mrs MILLER: That is the cost to establish it. Is there a budget allocation in this next year's budget to deal with that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Not specifically.

Mrs MILLER: Not specifically?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When I talked about the audit and assessment that is being undertaken at the moment, that is happening within existing resources within the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment.

Mrs MILLER: This will be an interesting one. Have you any idea what the time factor is in auditing all relevant legislation that may be impacted on by the move towards the EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are hoping to try to get that done by the end of July or August this year.

Mrs MILLER: This year? Okay.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, we are in July now so, hopefully, by end of August. I did make that announcement in parliament some time ...

Mrs MILLER: I know. This is estimates, so I am asking the same. Given that this is a big move, how is the department going to consult with industry and other affected parties about the relevant legislation? Is that going to involve travel throughout the Territory and, if so, what cost would be involved?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Costs will be involved in terms of ...

Mrs MILLER: In the travel?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The travel for?

Mrs MILLER: In consulting industry and other affected parties about the changes to the relevant legislation?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As you know, member for Katherine, during the election campaign, the Chief Minister announced the immediate establishment of a three-member independent EPA board. That will help government undertake further consultation on the final EPA model. I anticipate that government will make further announcements about the composition of the EPA board in the near future. At the moment, we are looking at that, so there will be three members who will make up a board that will undertake that consultation phase that is required - not just with the industry, that will be with the wider community.

Mrs MILLER: This is the question I am sure the member for Braitling will be interested hearing the answer to as well. Will the EPA, when it is set up, look after container deposit legislation as the EPA does in South Australia?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There are a number of things that the EPA will look at, member for Katherine. It will be overseen by an independent board that will have its legislative powers. If it chooses to look at CDL - I am not going to get into the pros and cons of the arguments of CDL. That will be something that, if the EPA wants to look at as part of its wider agenda, so be it. We cannot pre-empt that this is what members of an EPA will be doing. I am not going to, and cannot, pre-empt that this is what it will do.

Mrs MILLER: That is fine. Madam Deputy Chair, I have some other questions that can come under this, but I have them under Environment and Heritage. They are to do with the budget covering Environment and Heritage, and here it is broken up into ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: What aspects of the budget?

Mrs MILLER: The breakdown of the difference in the budget between years, repairs and maintenance. Do you want that ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you want to do them in non-output specifics ...

Mrs MILLER: I can.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... if you cannot identify specifically which section?

Mrs MILLER: Okay, yes, I can do that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Does that conclude your questions on Environmental Protection Services?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr MILLS: I have a question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sure, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: I am a humble member of a Country Liberal Party, and I am beginning to get some kind of grasp on the thinking behind policy positions that have been adopted by the Australian Labor Party. Could you please remind what is for rationale your uranium policy. I do not understand ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can just I say from a humble ALP member's position, member for Blain, uranium mines is not part of my portfolio responsibility. If you want to seek an answer, that should have been directed to the minister who has carriage of mines, and that was the Minister for Mines and Energy.

Mr MILLS: Ah, do not refer to him. He has ...

Mr WOOD: We tried, we tried.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are not going to goad me into the same thing that you goaded, or asked ...

Mr WOOD: A point of order! We did not goad him, we just asked him a question. He just did not give us an answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If I could answer, Madam Deputy Chair, the humble CLP member over there, the member for Blain. As I recall from what I was listening to this afternoon, when the minister for Mines was on and had been questioned in relation to this, he said very clearly - and I have the same position - that Labor's position on uranium has been very clear. I know that this is not going to be satisfactory either to the member for Blain or the member for Nelson. To be part of a team or a party and to have a position may not go down well with either member. However, our party position - and it is not about party position that should be in question here; it has been clear and has not changed. Our party position and the policy, both federally and in the Territory, does not support further uranium mining. It is a sound position environmentally, and there are many arguments for and against this. However, uranium mining is not my responsibility, nor is it covered in this portfolio.

Mr MILLS: I accept your response; however, I still have difficulty. Perhaps that is why I have assumed a position on the liberal side of politics. It is a liberal philosophical position where I have to take a responsibility for my own position rather than swallow a party line. I need to know, and understand, what my position is. I understand that the uranium mining position, principally, is an environmental position, therefore, I still have difficulty understanding it, in keeping with the member for Nelson and many other Territorians. If it is for environmental reasons, could you please describe the Labor Party's position on the Kyoto Protocol and greenhouse gas emissions ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Greenhouse gas emissions ...

Mr BURKE: A point of order! Can I ask which part of the budget this ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, I was just about to ...

Mr MILLS: It is to do with the environment. It needs to ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me. Just one moment ...

Mr MILLS: Oh, you are answering that question? I thought I was the one who asked the question; you answer that question then.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: What I am doing is about to point out to you that Kyoto comes under output 2.3 in Greenhouse Policy which is yet to come up for output questions. You can ask during output 2.3 which is coming up shortly.

Any further questions on the output group we are currently on?

Mr MILLS: Can you tell me what this output group is again?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is 2.I, Environmental Protection Services.

Mr MILLS: I will hold my fire.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I am sure you have a question.

Mr WOOD: I am a humble Independent.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Madam Deputy Chair, before the member for Nelson asks his question, I need to respond to the member for Blain and make it clear that we are here, after all, to talk about my portfolio and budget allocation. It is not about party policy, and that is the same with Kyoto.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you have any figures stating how many glass, plastic, aluminium, and wax paper drink containers are sold in the Territory each year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No.

Mr WOOD: Why not?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I say no as part of it, member for Nelson. To ensure that you get a really good detailed response to your question, I will hand over to my Executive Director, Lyn Allen, to answer your question.

Ms ALLEN: We do not currently have that information. It is information which will be collected; some parts of it will be collected starting this year as part of the Litter Abatement Resource Recovery Strategy.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, if you do not have any figures on how many drink containers are sold within the Territory, then how will you be able to know that your recycling programs are doing anything dramatic in relations to the number of containers sold in the Territory if you do not have those base figures?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am trying to find - I had that, member for Nelson. Part of these grant programs that we have, in looking at some of the areas, is looking at trying to get through some of strategic programs or projects that have been put in, looking at collecting and establishing some sort of baseline data that we can start looking at some of these. Also, a lot of the projects are through the litter and recycling grants and the environment grants.

Mr WOOD: You have given \$124 000 to community groups to reduce litter and increase recycling. What groups received that money and how did they reduce litter and increase recycling?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I could either read through some of these projects in terms of 2004-05 ...

Mr WOOD: You could table them, if you wish.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When I was talking about strategic and ongoing and how they benefit, we have projects like recycling tyres, marine debris control and education. For instance, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation - and I am sure one that you would like – has an aluminium can recycling project for Maningrida township. I can table these projects for you.

In respect of the second part of the question that you asked, this is a new grants program and some of them may be in the second round of funding for these projects. A lot of that is too early to be able to obtain any data as to what impact they have had.

Mr WOOD: Are these monies that have initiated from the Beverage Industry Environment Council's grants to the Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The funding for the litter grants - I will just clear this up because there has been a lot of misinformation in relation to the funding that government receives from the beverage industry. There have been figures like \$500 000 that we have received. That is not true. What government does receive from the beverage industry is \$250 000, and all of this is used to run the community litter grants. It is a great scheme and this year will see - if I can just talk about some of them - the Scouts Collect-a-can project and communities such as Nyirripi in Central Australia install their can crushers for better recycling and litter reduction. In answer to your question, yes, all of the \$250 000 received from the beverage industry goes towards litter.

Mr WOOD: That would be for two years?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was over three years. This funding does run out this year. Of course, we will be seeking to renegotiate. What we need to also make clear is that, yes, the industry should contribute, member for Nelson, to keeping our environment clean. There should not be any apologies about that.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, but I was on the Territory Anti-litter Committee for donkeys ages, which was funded by exactly the same group that is funding you. The reason it existed was primarily to make sure container deposit legislation did not eventuate in the Territory. That is exactly what the beverage industry is doing again today.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have a question or a statement?

Mr WOOD: Well no, Madam Deputy Chair, the minister did make some statements outside of my question. They needed a response.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister can.

Mr WOOD: That is right. This is not strictly Question Time, there is some rapport between us.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Estimates is to question. I am particularly aware of the clock, and that there are other members sitting on this Estimates Committee who have questions to ask. Member for Nelson, I will be starting to make this clear, quite rightly, so you ask questions rather than make statements.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, we all know that Territory Tidy Towns is a great project run by KAB. Would you consider guaranteeing the present funding to KAB on a three-year basis rather than one year at a time?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Certainly with KAB, they do get funded. We have given a commitment to continue their funding by financial year. At this moment, I will not commit in terms of the three-year funding agreements. There are other groups that are funded by my department and they do not have three-year agreements. I do not believe there should be a separate three-year agreement to one organisation when other organisations are on annual funding agreements.

Mr WOOD: It has been a program, as you say in your annual report, which has been quite successful in running things like the Territory Tidy Towns program. I would have thought that, by giving it that little more latitude, it had some certainty and knew that programs that it may have started in one year would certainly have a fair chance of continuing in another year. That is why I asked if that Keep Australia Beautiful Council could have a more certain future rather than one year at a time.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am not sure whether KAB's funding may be cut. There has been commitment, and they have been written to in terms of this year's funding commitment to them. Yes, Territory Tidy Towns is a great program. There are communities in my electorate that participate in part of the Territory Tidy Towns program. There are, and there have been, discussions between my office and Keep Australia Beautiful regarding agreed outcomes with the funding that is provided. We will continue to have those discussions which benefit both KAB and our government.

Mr WOOD: Is it the case that KAB's application for funding under the BIEC funds grants to run a container deposit trial was rejected? Who would have made that decision? Who is on the board who makes that decision?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When they put in their application, that would have gone to the committee, as I understand. They make the assessment.

Mr WOOD: No, who is on the committee, and who do they represent?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The current membership of the Litter Abatement and Resource Recovery Advisory Committee, is Louise Fuller, who is the Chair; Glenn Marshall, who is the Deputy Chair, Dave Mitchell, who is one of the ordinary members who is from Gove; Andrew Haniford, who is representing industry; Charlie King, who is on the non-government Keep Australia Beautiful Council, which is currently represented by Lorna Woods, and Moira McCreesh, who is from the health sector and representing the Katherine region.

Mr WOOD: You have said in a media release that the Northern Territory government is part of a national push seeking to phase out plastic bags by 2008. Could you explain what you mean by phasing out plastic bags? Does that mean we will have no plastic bags at all?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of it, member for Nelson is as per the national packaging covenant. It is anticipated that an agreement to phase out plastic bags, which is currently being negotiated with retailers, will form a schedule to the covenant once it has been finalised. That is expected to be around April 2006.

Mr WOOD: What I am trying to get, minister, is the actual practical reality of phasing out plastic bags. Does that mean all plastic bags will be non-existent in 2008?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No.

Mr WOOD: Can you give an explanation as to what exactly you mean, because that is written in the media release.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of that is to be expected in April 2006. There will be threshold for small business exemptions which are also yet to be finalised. I will hand over to Lyn Allen who will go through the details with you.

Ms ALLEN: As I understand from the plastic bag agreement from discussions that ministers had at the Environment Protection Heritage Council last week - which I was able to attend but the minister was not - there is still no agreement with retailers about what the scope of the plastic bag agreement might finally entail. They certainly have not come to any conclusion about what the thresholds for small business might be.

Mr WOOD: I suppose I could ask the question then, minister, why you say in your press release that you are seeking to phase out plastic bags by 2008? Is that something that is just not known, or the details not known?

Mr MILLS: Sounds good, though.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it does not sound good, member for Blain. I will choose to ignore that. That is part of the national agreement, which will be worked through.

Mr WOOD: Will this government consider taking on the model that either Ireland or our local store, Bunnings, has used; that is, you simply charge for plastic bags and that gives people the choice. As was found in Ireland, they reduced plastic bags in one year by roughly 90%. Here we are, we have been attempting to get rid of plastic bags. The statement, I think, from the Cabinet people was: 'We had six billion, we are down to 4.8 billion or 4.2 billion'. We still have an enormous number of plastic bags because industry is running this, and government is not willing to take on the industry. It is unfortunate that we do not take some hard decisions about plastic bags.

Just some more local questions; one you probably would have expected. Why did you decide not to issue a licence to the Humpty Doo landfill site after February this year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: February this year or next year?

Mr WOOD: Next year, sorry.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This has been an ongoing issue, and I heard you asking the question of minister Burns regarding the Humpty Doo dump. The licence has been extended to Litchfield Shire. The Litchfield Shire Council has known for a long time, member for Nelson, that there have been a number of problems associated with that dump. My office has been working with the council to try to meet their licence requirements.

Let me make it clear: Litchfield Shire is not being singled out, contrary to the perceptions that they and others feel that they have been singled out. They are not being singled out. The management requirement for each rubbish dump is based on the individual environmental issues and risk at each site. That has been a longstanding issue we have been working through with Humpty Doo dump. As was also said previously in parliament when asked about this, rubbish is a local government responsibility. You have previously been involved. Again I say that Litchfield Shire has known for some considerable time that there has been a need to shift the dump and that their licence for it was not going to be renewed indefinitely. We have tried to be as flexible as we can be and, therefore, a six month extension was granted to that licence.

Beyond this – hold on, I need to finish this - Litchfield Shire has some options. I know that you had the discussion and minister Burns provided answers – there has to be issues worked out and that certainly is

something that minister Burns and his department is working out with Litchfield Shire regarding another site. There are some options including establishing the current site as a transfer station and developing an alternative dump site and using the Shoal Bay facility for disposal of waste. But again, we are not forcing Litchfield Shire to go to Shoal Bay.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you do know that the Litchfield Shire Council does not own any of the land where it either has transfer stations or the Humpty Doo landfill site. It is Crown land that was set out by government for the tips. The council did not have any control over that. That is where they were told to put their tips.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, you know this falls under a ...

Mr WOOD: No, no, no.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And that issue is being worked but that is a separate issue.

Mr WOOD: Well, the minister said that and I am just responding, because it is not correct.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, well I am saying ...

Mr WOOD: I have some right to respond to the minister because this is not a one-way street.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: All I am saying is can we stick to the Environmental Protections Services.

Mr WOOD: Oh, give us a break.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, no. There is a whole committee of people here, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It is an important question because this is the only opportunity; the people in Litchfield Shire have to hear the reasons why the government is shutting this down. The minister is saying: 'We are not closing it down'. Of course it is; it is getting rid of the licence! That will require all of the Litchfield waste to go to Shoal Bay. Minister, do you realise how much that will cost the ratepayers of Litchfield Shire: for instance, what is now transported 500 m at the Humpty Doo transfer station to a landfill site, will now have to travel nearly 40 km.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, we are doing everything that we possibly can. I know that there is an issue of land, and that is being sorted out through minister Burns' department with Infrastructure and Planning. Regarding the area and the responsibility for my office in terms of the licence and the need for Litchfield Shire Council to meet their regulatory responsibilities under that licence, we will and are enforcing that. However, we are working with the Litchfield Shire Council to manage its existing dump within the environmental controls as stipulated by their licence.

We have extended it until February 2006. One hopes that we can work towards a resolution to everybody's satisfaction, and that includes Litchfield Shire and government. I take you back again. It is not as if this is a new thing that is being put on Litchfield Shire Council. This has been several years in which both departments have been working with Litchfield Shire Council to come to some resolution. Some of that onus and responsibility, member for Nelson, needs to go back on Litchfield Shire Council as well. Yes, government has a responsibility and we will meet our responsibility but, at the same time, instead of hitting us over the head with a stick, Litchfield Shire Council also needs to meet its responsibility of the licence it administers at the Humpty Doo dump.

Mr WOOD: At the risk of upsetting the Chair, I have to comment. The Litchfield Shire Council has been attempting, since John Maley was President, to find an alternative site. Government after government after government has just put that in the too-hard basket. Now comes the crunch and you are blaming Litchfield Shire Council. I do not accept that. Minister, are you also going to close the green waste down at Humpty Doo and, if you are, where do you expect green waste to go?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is another thing: there have been numerous complaints from nearby residents and there have been fires.

Mr WOOD: The same residents?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Whether it is the same residents or new residents, we have been taking complaints, member for Nelson, and they have been ongoing. They are not new complaints. These have been ongoing

complaints that there have been fires in the tip base and green waste, and a number of concerns have been expressed over the health implications. I know that it was mentioned by minister Burns to you when you discussing this issue that there has been a fire just this week in green waste at the tip.

Mr WOOD: May I ask where Humpty Doo residents - and many of those have mangoes and all sorts of things, and it will be great for them to leave their green waste on their property – are going to take their green waste?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The management of green waste will most likely be retained at the existing site for an interim period.

Mr WOOD: I had information that it was going.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We have until February, so we will work through that with Litchfield Shire Council.

Mr WOOD: It is an important issue because, if you do not have a place for green waste at Humpty Doo, it is more than likely that every block of Crown land and vacant lot will end up being a green dump.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, but I just said the management of green waste will most likely be retained at the existing site for an interim period.

Mr WOOD: That is what worries me; the interim period is what I was concerned about. All right, minister, the other question is: there was only one place in the whole of Litchfield Shire you could stockpile old vehicles. It appears that your department has said that old cars cannot be stockpiled there. It has something to do with the legislation. Is that the case? There is a big sign at the Humpty Doo tip saying it is your department.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the Executive Director, Lyn Allen.

Ms ALLEN: We became aware of that sign this week and we have officially ordered Litchfield Shire to take it down. It is not true.

Mr WOOD: Well, that is good news because if we did not have that place, there would certainly be car bodies out in the bush. Do you know why that sign was put up there? You know who put it up?

Ms ALLEN: No.

Mr WOOD: I will see if I can find out.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That was a no, for Hansard purposes. Any further questions on that output?

Mr WOOD: Yes, just quickly. In 2003-04 you licensed 17 waste fill sites. Would you be able to list those sites? Can you say how many were licensed for 2004-05 and where were those sites?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We do not have that information but we could certainly take it on notice.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That will be a question on notice. Can you state it again, please?

Mr WOOD: In 2003-04, you licensed 17 waste fill sites. Could you please list those sites and also the same for the 2004-05 year?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated acceptance of that question. I allocate that question No 9.5.

Mr WOOD: Just quickly, minister. You had compliance monitoring programs begun for the Blackmore River East Aquaculture Project. Have you any results of nutrient discharge into the Darwin Harbour from that project?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, I will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purpose of the minister, please restate that question.

Mr WOOD: Minister, your department has set up monitoring programs for the Blackmore River East Aquaculture Project. Could you give us the results of any nutrient discharge into the harbour from that project?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has indicated acceptance of that as a question on notice. That becomes question No 9.6.

Mr WOOD: That is all my questions on that output.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output Group 2.1, Environmental Protection Services? There being no further questions on that, that concludes consideration of output 2.1.

Answers to Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Before we continue with Output 2.2, I table questions on notice 1 and 2 by the Department of Justice; questions 4.3 to 4.8; and questions 4.11 and 4.13.

Output 2.2 - Heritage Conservation Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 2.2, Heritage Conservation Services.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, in relation to the Darwin Waterfront Project, what amount of contaminated soil is to be removed and where is it going to be placed?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Katherine, that does not fall under Heritage Conservation Services.

Mrs MILLER: You are right; this is the one where I was saying to you I had all these questions. I will leave them to the end.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Does anyone have questions for Output 2.2, Heritage Conservation Services?

Mr WOOD: Minister, what has happened to the East Arm Leprosarium memorial site that was to be developed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: A very good question, member for Nelson. I know, in February 2004, when I spoke in the Assembly, and both ...

Mr WOOD: I thought it was back that long.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, it was February 2004 when I spoke in the Assembly about the East Arm Leprosarium. It was a big part of that report. It was good to get the bipartisan support which we had from the former shadow, the former member for Daly, and yourself. It was one report on heritage that had been tabled where I think everyone was in agreement with. I did announce that government was taking some definite steps to address the situation there.

A viewing platform overlooking the site was completed in March 2004, and an interpretive panel about leprosy and its treatment in the Northern Territory has since been installed on the platform. Plans for the installation of a memorial at the entrance of the former leprosarium on Berrimah Road are also under way. My Office of the Environment and Heritage has arranged for a local architectural firm to draw up a design for a memorial, and a model of the proposed memorial has been built. A proposal for the memorial has been shown to people associated with the leprosarium. It has been well received, and more work will be

done this year in order that the construction can commence once funds become available. If you want some further information or details on that, I can hand over to Michael Wells, who is the officer in charge.

Mr WOOD: Before you hand over to Michael, I have some more information on the names of people who actually worked there.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Good, I think you need to forward some of that.

Mr WELLS: Michael Wells, Acting Director of Heritage Conservation Services. I am not sure there is much more to add, apart from that the additional time which has been taken has mainly been taken up through consultation with the people associated with the leprosarium and, as you might appreciate, some of those consultations were rather intensive. An example is Dr Hargraves, who was closely associated with the leprosarium. He is now retired and living in Tasmania, and is apparently a fairly private person who does not speak to just anyone. However, one of the sisters who worked at the leprosarium was able to go there over Christmas to describe the proposal and run through things with him, and so on. It has taken time to contact people such as him and people who worked there, and former patients, and to work through these issues. We are just about through that stage now and, as I say, it has been quite well received and we can move on to the next step.

Mr WOOD: I had better get my wife to give you a letter, which I may have with me, from some of the sisters in New South Wales who sent a list of people who worked there. Is the old entrance part of the memorial to be preserved, because that is all that is left of the site?

Mr WELLS: The memorial is proposed to be located next to the entry, quite deliberately, so that people can have a sense that this was where the entry was. As you know, once you go through that first 100 m or so, there is actually nothing there; it has been razed.

Mr WOOD: That is the reason we asked that it be kept or preserved. Thank you.

Minister, when can we expect to see a start on the Interpretive Centre at Strauss Airstrip?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I could work through some of that. Work is about to commence on the new visitor facilities for Strauss Airstrip consisting of a car park, an interpretive shelter and full-size cut-outs of World War II aircraft. The best person to describe some of this - because he puts so much description - is Michael Wells. I might hand over to Michael to go through with you what is happening there and the proposed works.

Mr WELLS: Yes, work is just about to start now. All the documentation and some of the physical work has been completed, such as the construction of the three full-sized cut-outs of World War II aircraft, which are going to be positioned next to the strip to catch people's eyes as they move up the highway. It will look, from a distance, as though there are three real aircraft parked next to the strip there. We are aiming for completion by 15 August, which is the 60th anniversary of the signing of the surrender by the Japanese, which brought World War II to an end.

Mr WOOD: Was there any consideration of the possibility of the government bringing out some members of the Strauss family for that occasion?

Mr WELLS: I do not think so, no. However, now that you mention it, that would be a possibility. I know that - I cannot remember her name now - was it Judith Green?

Mr WOOD: Judi and Payden Green.

Mr WELLS: That is right, yes. They came out a couple of years ago. I think in the last year or two.

Mr WOOD: Last year.

Mr WELLS: We could certainly look at inviting them out and seeing whether they wish to attend.

Mr WOOD: I can give you contacts. It might just fit in with their summer break, because they are both teachers.

Mr WELLS: Yes, we would be quite open to that suggestion.

Mr WOOD: Can I contact you through the minister later?

Mr WELLS: That would be fine.

Mr WOOD: Just quickly, minister. I know you announced in one of your media releases about quite a few heritage sites being declared as heritage precincts. Will the government consider nominating all the World War II airstrips to at least give them some protection to stop them from being destroyed? I know you might say they have to come up for evaluation but, by the time you evaluate every one of these airstrips, they may not still be there. The only other possibility is under the new NT Planning Scheme - I presume there is still a heritage zone that was originally in there. Is that another possibility to get from zoned heritage, at least to identify they are important sites?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: One of the commitments - and I have talked about it as the minister - is trying to look at all our World War II heritage sites, not just on our register. I have had some brief discussions with the federal minister for the Environment when he came up in April this year to look at a joint Northern Territory/Commonwealth response, or getting Commonwealth assistance and support in getting all of our World War II heritage sites in the Top End on the national register as well as our own. That is something that we do have a commitment to looking at and addressing.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Greenhouse Policy

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now called for questions on Output 2.3, Greenhouse Policy. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. As I was asking before, there is difficulty in marrying two ALP policy positions. One is on a position that is about 30 years old with regards to uranium mining, which I understand emanates from a desire to protect the environment from the dangers of uranium – granted, 30 years old - and recently, the Kyoto Protocol for greenhouse gas and carbon trading requirements have been placed upon the globe. Those two do not quite fit together – intellectually at least. Minister, which state or territory parliament has not placed into legislation the Kyoto Protocols regarding greenhouse gas emissions and carbon trading requirements? Which state or territory parliament has not made a move on ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Blain ...

Mr MILLS: ... greenhouse gas emissions?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Blain, that question is outside the scope of the budget estimates.

Mr MILLS: I would say not because, otherwise, we are just going to be debating numbers on a piece of paper.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is, seriously, outside the scope. Well no, we are not debating, there has been a ...

Mr MILLS: There has to be some thinking behind your apportioning of ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... far broader debate ...

Mr MILLS: ... budgetary allocations.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You cannot, at a Territory level budget estimates, ask for comment on all other jurisdictions ...

Mr MILLS: No, no, well ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is outside the scope.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I, Madam Deputy Chair, maybe attempt to - and I am not going to get into the Labor Party policy - address what the member for Blain was asking, specific to the Northern Territory. I am not going to provide you - nor do I have the information - regarding what other states and territories have that. I am here to answer questions in relation to our Northern Territory government, and my responsibility as a minister.

In terms of the Northern Territory's strategy for greenhouse action, the Greenhouse Policy Unit within the Department of Environment and Heritage has worked and is working with all agencies to gain agreement to draft a Northern Territory strategy for greenhouse action 2005. The draft strategy is being finalised for presentation to Cabinet, for which it will seek its endorsement.

The second part of your question when you talked about emissions trading, the Greenhouse Policy Unit, with the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development, represents the Northern Territory government on the Inter-jurisdictional Emissions Trading Working Group. It has an acronym here but this - and it is a terrible acronym isn't it? Anyway, this working group was established at the invitation of New South Wales Premier Carr in January 2004 to design a National Emissions Trading Scheme in Australia for consideration by all governments.

In December 2004, the same working group provided its first progress report to state Premiers and territory Chief Ministers. The report identified a number of key design elements for National Emissions Trading Scheme that will be used as a basis for further investigation and analysis by the working group. The Greenhouse Policy Unit has contributed \$1700 to a number of consultancies undertaken on behalf of the working group. Additional contributions from the Greenhouse ...

Mr MILLS: Sorry, did you say \$1700?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: To a number of consultancies?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: All right.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Additional contributions from the Greenhouse Policy Unit are expected in 2005-06 as the working group undertakes analysis and economic modelling to further investigate the design of an Emissions Trading Scheme. The Northern Territory government has not made a decision on the Northern Territory participation on National Emissions Trading Scheme should such a national scheme eventuate.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, because you have actually answered it. The answer to the question of 'which state or territory parliament has not formulated any policy' is the Northern Territory. It just does not marry up with the policy position of the Labor government.

Going on, I am glad you mentioned Bob Carr. New South Wales Labor Premier Bob Carr has called for more debate so that we can actually discuss these matters on uranium mining and suggested that nuclear power would be a green friendly alternative source of fuel to meet Australia's future energy needs. Do you believe that the nuclear option is a cleaner energy source to replace the polluting power plants that currently provide electricity and contribute to global warming?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I seek the Chair's guidance on this in terms of ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, you know you do not have to answer that. It is outside your portfolio area; it is up to you whether you want to indulge this line of questioning.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No.

Mr WOOD: Can I put it through you, Madam Deputy Chair? We deal with outcomes. The greenhouse policy is exactly that; it is a policy. Therefore, is extremely broad: to provide policy advice and coordination of the Northern Territory government's response to greenhouse matters. It is not like whether we fix 500 km of road this year; it is about policy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: And there is no nuclear aspect to the current greenhouse policy. It is outside the scope.

Mr MILLS: Oh, well, it is about the allocation ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me, I have given the advice. The minister has decided she is not going to answer it.

Mr Wood: It is about outcomes.

Mr MILLS: I can accept that there is no desire to debate this or talk about it and that will speak for itself and stand on the record.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: As will your comments.

Mr MILLS: Of course, they will. That is why I am elected – to talk about things and ask questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is right. So do you have a further question?

Mr MILLS: I do have a further question. Do you believe that there should be more debate and discussion about uranium as a cleaner energy source? Do you think we should talk about it more?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Blain, it is totally irrelevant for you to ask me what is my personal opinion.

Mr MILLS: You can ask a CLP person, and they will tell you what they think.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Maybe that is the CLP approach to it. I am part of a team. I am here as the minister with our government policy. It is about this budget process and estimates; it is not about my personal opinion of uranium.

Ms Carney: You did not ask her for a personal opinion. She is the minister.

Mr MILLS: In fact, you are a minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You did ask. He asked for my opinion.

Mr MILLS: No, no. Your opinion as a minister of the Crown. Do you think as a community leader and a minister of the Crown that there should be more discussion about uranium as a cleaner energy source?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think that this is a totally irrelevant line of questioning. I will continue to respond to your question in relation to whether it is opening debate about uranium; what I think about it and so on. If this issue should arise, so be it.

Whether that debate happens is not centred on what I say, member for Blain. No one can stop any debate, now or in the future, in relation to uranium mining. The pros and cons debates will happen. It is not up to me to give my opinion of the whole process.

Mr MILLS: I accept what you say, though it is the Territory parliament and the government that has been elected that should be leading in these matters. Of course, these matters will be discussed. If you look at the way the debate is being conducted in the national community, particularly in the Territory where we have grave concerns about the future energy supplies to keep the economy going, at the same time as balancing environmental concerns, we really do need to work together to approach this issue very sensibly. Therefore, in the interest of a bipartisan approach to this issue of uranium mining and a cleaner environment, would you join me in supporting a parliamentary select committee to assess the mass of information available from the current national and global debate?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The question goes to the responsibility of the Leader of Government Business in terms of sessional committees in government. It is outside the scope. Can we stick to questions within the scope of this estimates output group?

Mr Mills interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I ruled, member for Blain, that it is outside scope.

Mr MILLS: Well, you can determine that scope. For goodness sake!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I have.

Mr MILLS: We have consciences, we have obligations and responsibilities to ensure that we address the issue that affect not only ourselves but our children, and responsibly attend to policy issues that undergird budgetary allocations.

Mr WOOD: Hear, hear!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: My responsibility here and now is to chair in accordance with the rules of the estimates process, which I am doing.

Mrs MILLER: In other words, gagging.

Mr MILLS: Yes, okay.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Hold on a minute! It is not about gagging. I find it quite offensive for the member for Katherine to say that is about gagging. It is not about gagging. If the member for Blain cannot accept my answer, well, that is his problem and not mine.

Mr MILLS: It is actually our problem, because this is clearly on the table. If government does not provide leadership in this, someone else will. The responsibility rests upon government in this matter. You have responsibility for apportioning the assets, the resources of the Northern Territory in terms of this budget, to address very important issues. If the issue is closed down, no response from a minister of the Crown, and if the Chairman of this Estimates Committee chooses to interpret the rules and regulations of the debate to restrict any discussion on this matter that satisfies any fair appraisal of this matter, I find that completely unsatisfactory - completely unsatisfactory!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Do you have any further questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes. Have you set any reduction targets of greenhouse gas emissions? Any targets at all?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is part of the draft strategy that I was talking about that will outline a comprehensive set of actions to minimise greenhouse gas emissions in the Northern Territory and to plan for the likely impacts of climate change.

Mr MILLS: I am very wary of that kind of language from this government - strategies and directions and so on. Real targets: have they been set? I think the answer is no.

How many meetings concerning reductions have been conducted between the federal government and the Northern Territory government? How many actual meetings have been conducted to deal with this serious business?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You can say that there has been nothing to date.

Mr MILLS: No, I am not saying that. I am asking ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Hold on a minute! To date, there has not been a greenhouse strategy for the Northern Territory. Do not sit there and get all holier-than-thou and think that under the CLP government you had a greenhouse strategy and you had set targets.

Mr MILLS: I am asking you. You are in government now; you are minister of the Crown now.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No. Do not become sanctimonious about thinking that you guys had a greenhouse strategy because you did not have one.

Mr MILLS: No, I am not thinking that. I am asking the question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I said, as the minister with carriage under this portfolio, we are now drafting a strategy. Whether you like the terminology or not, we are looking at developing a greenhouse plan.

Mr MILLS: I honestly have to ask the question. A strategy results in something that is measurable. It is a little like the plastic bags. It looks great in a press release, but what thinking has gone on to actually effect

a real change that we can be satisfied with? It is the same sort of issue here. A strategy sounds fantastic. How many meetings?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It will happen.

Mr MILLS: 'Trust us'. All right. Well, that will be the end of my questions. I am reasonably unsatisfied but that will do for now.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 2.3, Greenhouse Policy.

Mr WOOD: Yes. Minister, you mentioned in your annual report that you held a competition for the design and building of two greenhouse-friendly and ecologically-sustainable houses. Could you tell us what those houses will cost to build?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, I will hand you over to the executive director, who will go through those various points.

Ms ALLEN: I cannot answer the question about the cost to build them. The competition was run by the government at a cost of approximately \$117 000 to government as a whole, not just to the Office of Environment and Heritage. My recollection of the winning house which was on display in Palmerston, was that the selling price was in the vicinity of \$350 000.

Mr WOOD: What I am asking, minister - and it is great that we have people who are trying to have houses that are greenhouse friendly and ecologically sustainable - under our present Building Code, does this mean that houses which are cheaper to live in - they need less electrically and are cooler - are unaffordable to the average householder simply because we really have a contradiction in house design. One is a house that is built to the cyclone code and is cheaper, with brick walls, airconditioning, very little flow-through; and the other one is one which your department has looked at and is great, but too expensive for the average family. Have you looked at that issue? Do you believe you can design an ecologically sustainable house that will be cheap enough for the average family to buy?

Ms ALLEN: I understand from the winner of the Palmerston Top End house - and I have not had the same discussions with the Central Australian people - that the intent behind their design was, in fact, to build a conventional type of house and to encourage people to see the type of improvements that you could put in a conventional style house. The house in Palmerston, which I am not sure whether you saw, is a brick, one-storey house built in a way which encourages flow-through ventilation. It is built in pods so there is ventilation; it has wide eaves; and it has a lot of roof circulation and insulation. Part of the cost was that it is airconditioned; however, they were anticipating that it would use less airconditioning. Their intent was to encourage to people who were not really interested in going outside the square and wanted a conventional house to see the sorts of design factors which could be designed, and to incorporate them in standard buildings.

Mr WOOD: I am just saying that, whilst these things are great, the first home owners can only get \$240 000 from HomeNorth. Once you start moving outside those parameters people cannot really get the benefits of these new style homes. We probably had them years ago. Look at some of the old houses at the RAAF and some of the old Housing Commission houses; they were louvered and might not have been the best looking, however ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, they went in Cyclone Tracy.

Mr WOOD: Some did, some did not. I am talking about the ground level ones. However, what we had before seemed to be far more ecologically friendly than what we have today. I am saying to the minister if there are ways we can try to match the requirements of the building boards of today with what you are trying to put forward, it would be a worthwhile exercise.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: More questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, a couple, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, have you been involved with the buses and their changeover to a gas/diesel mix fuel?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No.

Mr WOOD: I would have thought you would have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That falls under DIPE, minister Burns.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Transport.

Mr WOOD: I would have thought it came under greenhouse gas emissions.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That would be considered as part of the greenhouse ...

Mr WOOD: All right, I can understand. I thought I would let you know that it is actually occurring. It is a good story.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: My department is on the ball, member for Nelson. Do not be facetious like that.

Mr WOOD: I am not being facetious ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are.

Mr WOOD: No, I am just helping. The other one is carbon trading. ConocoPhillips, in their agreement to build the Wickham Point plant, I believe said they would do a deal with a company in Western Australia and provide carbon trading trade-off to balance the emissions that they will produce from the Wickham gas plant. Has that side of the equation been fulfilled?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am not sure. I will hand you to the executive director, Lyn Allen.

Ms ALLEN: I am sorry, I am not familiar with the arrangements that may have been speculated with Western Australia and ConocoPhillips. I was not here for that part of the assessment. However, it is true that ConocoPhillips is looking at offsetting its emissions and we are in ongoing talks with them. They are commercial-in-confidence at the moment, but they are ongoing.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask through the Chair, if it was stated in the environmental impact statement they were going to do it, why would it then be commercial-in-confidence now?

Ms ALLEN: They will do it. The nature of what it is, and the value of it, and all of those sorts of things is currently - we have an undertaking with them that it is confidential. There are third parties associated with their negotiations.

Mr WOOD: Would we have a guarantee that when negotiations were completed the public would know what had occurred?

Ms ALLEN: I am confident that the public will see what the outcome is.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on output 2.3, Greenhouse Policy?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that has just reminded me when you are talking about this environmental housing, two years ago it was announced that Katherine was going to have one of those built and there was a block of land cleared for it in Coolabah Circuit in Katherine East. That block of land is still looking at me. Can you tell me what has happened to that house in Katherine and why that has not gone ahead?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As far as I know, member for Katherine - and I will just get this confirmed - yes, we were supposed to, but there were no entries submitted from the great community of Katherine. That is ...

Mrs MILLER: Were you actually looking for local builders to tender for that?

Ms ALLEN: Any builders. Builders need to put their hands up for it.

Mrs MILLER: So a builder could have come from Darwin, but nobody wanted to come to Katherine. Is that what you are saying?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are not sure, because we did not receive anything; there was no information. No entries to the competition were received at all either from Katherine or from builders in Darwin. As to what that problem was, there were no entries to the competition received for the competition for Katherine. What those reasons were, we are not sure. There were just no ...

Mrs MILLER: So there were three houses? There was one to be built in Darwin, one in Alice Springs, and one in Katherine, and then they were going to be judged which was the most environmentally friendly? Is that right?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: There were no takers for Katherine at all, we dipped out again?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well no, we did not - I will just make it clear, member for Katherine - stop this from going ahead in Katherine. I am not sure what part of ...

Mrs MILLER: No, I was not suggesting you did, I was just saying Katherine dipped out.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, but when you say 'we dipped out again', it was because there were no entries received. If we had received an entry, the house would have happened in Katherine, which happened in Palmerston and Alice Springs.

Mrs MILLER: It is actually very friendly at the moment. It is just a block of land. It could not still be done, could it? It was part of the competition?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, that was part of the Year of the Built Environment in 2004, so Katherine did miss its opportunity.

Mrs MILLER: Very unfortunate. I have one more question. There is a budget of \$500 000 for greenhouse policy, I think you call it. What is that money allocated for? What will you do with that \$0.5m? It says it is for provision ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: For policy advice and coordination.

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There are two, provision of policy advice and coordination, and promote greenhouse friendly ...

Mrs MILLER: Who do you provide it to?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It would be to government and to the wider community. It would be working mainly to government in terms of policy advice and coordination.

Mrs MILLER: So are you seeking advice, are you?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The office is providing government with advice.

Mrs MILLER: So you allocate \$500 000 to the office of what?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is a program area within the Office of Environment and Heritage. It is a program area within the broader office. That \$0.5m would pay for three staff members.

Mrs MILLER: That is what I am looking for.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Those staff members would have a number of duties to carry out. Part of those duties would be to provide policy advice and coordination within the Office of Environment and Heritage.

Mrs MILLER: Right. Okay.

Mr WOOD: May I ask a question in the non-specific?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That depends whether the member for Katherine has finished on greenhouse questions.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I have, thank you.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of all output groups. I call for non-output specific budget questions.

Mr WOOD: Don't say it too slowly, will you?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If you are going to be rude ...

Mr WOOD: I was not being rude!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I was not speaking slowly.

Mr WOOD: No, I know you were not.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Well, look at the time!

Mr WOOD: Oh, you have 30 seconds.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes the Estimates Committee hearing. I thank everyone who participated in or sat through and observed the process government now has in place ...

Mr WOOD: A point of order!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is no point of order. I have been following the digital clock on my computer. It says 11.35.

Mr WOOD: Madam Deputy Chair, I was not being rude to you; you know that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, I have followed the digital clock on my computer ...

Mr WOOD: We have been using that clock all night.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No! There has been argument about that clock.

Mr WOOD: It is a nice looking clock.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: What I have done instead is follow the digital.

Mr WOOD: I concede.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will continue to thank everyone who participated in or sat through and observed the process government has in place to address the scrutiny of the budget. In particular, I take this opportunity ...

Mr Wood: I used that clock there. In the era of government domination of an important organ of parliament ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Order, member for Nelson!

Mr WOOD: Sorry.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: In particular, I take this opportunity to thank all members of the Estimates Committee for the manner in which these public hearings have been conducted, and acknowledge the work of the Legislative Assembly staff, with a specific mention of the extremely hardworking and long-working Table and Hansard areas.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: This committee will table its report in the Assembly on the afternoon of Thursday, 7 July 2005. I now formally close the public hearings of the Estimates Committee for 2005-06. Thank you.

The committee adjourned.
