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Madam Speaker Purick took the Chair at 10 am.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Katherine**

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that leave of absence be granted to the Member for Katherine for today.

Motion agreed to.

**VISITORS
Rosebery Primary School**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of two Year 3/4 classes from Rosebery Primary School, accompanied by their teachers, Carli Carey and Amy Abbott. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

**STAMP DUTY AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 1)**

Continued from 19 October 2016.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, the opposition does not oppose this legislation. I also thank the Treasurer for arranging a briefing for me and some of the staff. It was probably one of the quickest briefings we have received; I think it was 11 minutes. There were not many questions we could ask on the legislation.

It should be noted that this was a very clear policy which the government—the opposition at the time—went to the election with. On that basis we will support it. There are, however, a couple of comments I wish to make in regard to the legislation being part of an overarching policy which the government has a mandate to introduce.

First, the size of the first home buyer market is approximately 500 to 750 people. Much of the estimate of this is based on the theory of everyone moving up. There is a lot of merit to the new scheme; however, the Labor government has been a bit reckless in its cutting of the successful Home Improvement Scheme, which was introduced by the Country Liberal government. The government argues that it is replacing this with its own scheme, but \$20m was made available to the existing scheme, which was made up of \$2000 vouchers in matched spending. Compared to the 500 to 750 people, 10 000 families could have benefited from the Country Liberals' scheme. Many people have missed out.

Matched spending is cost efficient and effective. It creates jobs in the local economy. It supports local tradies and small businesses. An upgrading of the housing stock across the Territory would have been an opportunity—the Master Builders said there is an opportunity to upgrade cyclone coding and the energy efficiency of some houses. The tradies scheme directly targeted that opportunity. The first home owner scheme will also target some of that opportunity, but it is a very restrictive scheme available to 500 to 750 people, compared to 10 000.

In the current scheme there is \$3.2m budgeted over the forward estimates, \$6m this year and \$13.2m ongoing. The difference between the two schemes is that ours gave a big bang for the buck. In other words it was a match scheme. This scheme is a lot damper than that. It is the difference between benefits—looking at a few versus looking at many. The opportunity of our scheme was not just for one but for many.

Seventy per cent of the wealth in the Territory is held in residential real estate. That is critical. Our scheme was aimed at total real estate, not just first home owners. The opportunity we lost with the \$2000 scheme—it incentivised Territorians to upgrade the stock of residential real estate and it would have had a net positive effect on the wealth of the Territory. This, in turn, would have led to more spending investment, growth and jobs.

We do not oppose this legislation; the government has a mandate to introduce it. The legislation is quite simple, which was the reason for the quick briefing. I thank the Treasurer for organising that briefing and I thank the staff for providing it.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, this has quite a history. Last year the Member for Araluen introduced a motion to provide assistance to people buying existing homes, and there was some interesting debate at the time. I was one of the people who supported the idea but not the motion. There were some issues in relation to whether we were telling Treasury to do something which may not have been appropriate from the parliament at that stage.

I would like to read a couple of things from that debate. I am bringing these forward to ask the minister her opinion on these matters which, theoretically, should still be relevant. The then Member for Blain said, this is in the initial debate that the Member for Araluen brought forward:

All states and territories have now ended first home owner grants for established homes. This followed clear evidence that such grants only increase the prices of established homes and exacerbate any imbalance between demand and supply for housing. There was an extra \$12 000 or \$25 000 to buy an established dwelling. That meant the price of homes would go up at least \$12 000 or \$25 000. That means the grant does not help first buyers to get into the market; all it does is distort the market and make housing out of reach for more Territorians. It also means real estate agents receive a fatter commission. This is all subsidised by the government and makes for higher prices for first homebuyers. This is not something we will ever support. The government intended, through the removal of the First Home Owner Grant for established homes, in conjunction with land release, to decrease the demand-fuelled effect on housing prices. This strategy is working.

Later, on 2 December 2015, the second debate was similar, but with some changes. The Member for Casuarina spoke during that debate and said:

I have said this in the past, and I will reiterate that Labor supports the concept that assistance should be provided to people seeking to buy a principal place of residence if they currently do not own a home. Our position is broader than what is proposed by the member for Araluen, but I agree and understand where she is coming from with this motion and the call for government to consider relief or assistance for those who are looking to buy a principal place of residence. We support people getting into their own home if they are a first home owner or have owned a house before and do not now.

She went on further to say:

Members would be aware—and we have talked about many issues today that contribute to this—that losing one's house through a divorce or a financial separation can often mean the same level of financial difficulty getting back into the housing market as for those people seeking to get in for the first time.

I think sometimes we forget those cases of hardship:

We support the concept of assistance applying to new and existing homes. We are, however, extremely concerned that these grants can have inflammatory impact on house prices. Therefore, we want a proper Treasury analysis, and then to move forward with a policy that has the effect of getting people into homes without causing the price of housing to increase. We have requested that previously.

If we read further, in the last debate—it is funny how things change; the government was opposed to it the first time and then Mr Tollner said in the second debate, as the then Treasurer:

Thank you very much, member for Brennan. I will not take too much time. As I said at the outset, this is somewhat of a worthless debate, but I am prepared to put things on the record that have already been put on the record several times.

Getting to the point of why it is a worthless debate and what people on the other side seem to do with their time – it is a bit difficult to understand. Government supports the motion, but it is a pointless debate. If members opposite and the member for Araluen were paying any attention, they would know government is already doing this. In fact, I have a media release from the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and the Minister for Housing dated 17 June 2015, which is six or seven months ago. It is titled 'Review into government housing program initiatives'. The first line of that media release is:

The Northern Territory government will review its suite of housing supply and assistance programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of Territorians.

Further in it says:

The review of housing programs will encompass:

- *what level and type of residential dwelling demand exists in the market*
- *the impact of government's affordable housing initiatives in assisting Territorians on limited incomes into home ownership*
- *the flow of new residential land on to the market as a result of the government's land release program ...*

And, wait for it:

- *what concessions for first home buyers might be most appropriate in the market*

Then it goes on to say:

- *social housing demands, including public, assisted and homelessness services; and*
- *how we can better work in partnership with community housing providers.*

The minister finally said:

We will support this motion; we already are. It has been a great debate.

And he carried on a bit about the review.

In our last debate, which, again, was about stamp duty amendment, on 25 May this year—that is when the government decided it would introduce changes. The bill puts assistance in place for first home buyers in a responsible and affordable manner as part of the government's Budget 2016–17. The assistance is in the form of stamp duty relief to first home buyers of established homes.

We have gone from being against a review to supporting one, which was already claimed six or seven months before the debate, to the government then agreeing to stamp duty relief for people buying established homes.

The minister said in the *Hansard*:

The discount is a temporary measure, aimed at providing a short-term stimulus to the residential property market while also assisting first home buyers to buy their first home by reducing their upfront transaction costs.

It is important that a few things are asked about this bill. Has the government looked at the possible effects of increasing the price of houses, which has come up more than once in this debate? Can the government prove that the price of houses will not increase—second-hand, used or pre-loved houses, whatever you want to call them—because of the exemption on stamp duty? Where is the review that the previous government said it put into practice? That review would have been done by Treasury. I presume that does not disappear simply because there was a change of government. Has the review been released for discussion? Was it something the government looked at? Even though it made a pre-election promise in relation to this, did the government look at it when it came to power to see whether Treasury raised any issues that should be taken into account?

Just as when young people buy second-hand cars because that is all they can afford, you also buy a second-hand house because that is all you can afford. I remember discussing this issue when I first got into parliament. I always felt that house and land prices were too high. I was told by the then Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, that first home owners buy a unit first. Then when they have a kid or two they move from a unit to something else, which might be an established house. Then, as they save their money and sell that house, they can move towards buying their own new house. I suppose this scheme proposes another

way of doing it. You give people an opportunity not to just live in a unit. For some people that is probably fine, but others want a bit of space in their lives.

I look around some of the old Darwin suburbs and wonder why some of those designs are not still used. We build very flash houses today. I was in central Queensland recently and I went to Roma. I drove around a new suburb and took a photo of it. I can put that photo next to a house in Palmerston or the northern suburbs where Defence housing is. They are exactly the same. Some of the houses in Rapid Creek and the old parts of Nightcliff are basic, but they provide accommodation. They are not as flash looking as the houses we have today. The developers want to have the best-looking house, not necessarily the best tropical house, to sell.

Those older houses will always have a lesser value than some of the houses in the new suburbs. This gives people the opportunity to buy those houses when they come on the market. You have also given people some money to upgrade those houses, which is good. That gives young people a chance to buy some furniture or upgrade the house, which, in the long run, increases the value of the house. Therefore when they sell the house they can move to a more modern style of house if they wish, as their house has increased in value.

I am interested in the minister's response to see what research has been done or what acknowledgement has been made of the possibility, as the previous Member for Blain said, of these types of changes to stamp duty causing an inflationary effect on housing prices.

What happened to the review the then Treasurer spoke about? Has that review been released and did it cover some of the issues we are dealing with in this debate today?

Ms LAWLER (Education): Madam Speaker, we have already heard from my colleague, the Treasurer, about why this government has introduced the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill 2016 to assist the Territory's first home owners get into a new home.

The Labor government's initiative to make established properties more accessible to first home buyers has been welcomed by Territorians. It vastly improves the chances of not only young Territorians, as the Member for Nelson said, but those who are able to enter the property market, which every member of this House would agree is a desirable outcome.

Our strategy is not just about home ownership. We are also working to stem the population drain which has affected the Territory in recent years. The economic impact of the shrinking population has been nowhere more obvious than on the Territory's property market. Property prices have stalled. There has been a fall of more than 6% in the Darwin and Palmerston market over the last 12 months, according to the Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory.

REINT data for the March quarter showed agents had recorded the lowest sales volume since regular records for the industry first began in 1999. The same report showed sales volumes had fallen dramatically in Darwin and were down 31.6% year on year, whilst in Palmerston, which my electorate is in, the sales collapsed by 45.9% over the same period. Rental market vacancy rates for houses and units were some of the highest on record, according to the report.

The REINT listed several Territory-specific factors under what it called the key impacts affecting the market. Not surprisingly it blamed the decline in population and economic activity. REINT also cited the flow-on effect of the previous government's withdrawal of the first home owner incentive on existing homes. In many ways that report represents a fair barometer of the economic circumstances the CLP left in the wake of its chaotic four years in government.

Before entering politics I watched as these factors played out in the Palmerston market. The slump in the market since last year has been particularly noticeable in the older, original suburbs of Gray, Driver and Moulden, which make up the electorate of Drysdale. These three suburbs generally have bigger block sizes. Most of them are 700 to 800 square metres, and some even larger than that. These suburbs have the bonus of including some of our great schools in Palmerston. Driver, Gray and Moulden are the original, long-term schools with long-term principals and stable programs.

Those suburbs are ideal for our young families. They have large block sizes for kids to play. We are not looking at the new suburbs of Johnston and Zuccoli, where the block sizes are down to 300 square metres. When you have large blocks you have space for children, and they are great suburbs for kids and young families to grow up in.

The young families wanting to move into the area simply had not been able to break into the market. High property prices coupled with a lack of assistance from the previous government made it virtually impossible for them to buy into established properties in Palmerston.

With young couples frozen out of the market, property owners in Gray, Driver and Moulden in the electorate of Drysdale, who, in many cases, moved to the suburbs as young people, had the opposite problem. Many of that generation had raised their families and wanted to downsize, but, with the market flatlining, those older couples and families could not sell.

When I was doorknocking in Chin Gong Circuit in Driver, near Palmerston Senior College, I spoke to an older public servant. She had retired, or was just about to, and she had lived in that area for over 25 years. She had her house on the market because she wanted to downsize and move into a unit, but she was not able to sell.

When doorknocking in Gray, Driver and Moulden I saw that there was a house for sale on nearly every street. Some had been on the market for a long time and were vacant and looking quite run down. One of the key things I committed to was the first home owners relief for existing homes in order to revitalise those older suburbs in Palmerston. We need to get the young families in and refresh those houses and suburbs.

What happened in Palmerston's older suburbs reflects why Labor saw the first home buyer initiative for established properties as a way to unlock the market. The Territory needed a circuit breaker to spark our property market back into life. It is not only me saying that; the Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory's Chief Executive Officer, Quentin Kilian, was reported as welcoming the Labor government's First Home Owner Scheme. Less than a month after the initiative was launched on 1 September, Mr Kilian said the scheme was, in his words:

... beginning to show some stimulation ...

After reading the real estate section in Saturday's newspaper I posted on Facebook that it was great to see slashes across those photos saying 'Under Contract' or 'Sold' on those properties. I am already seeing houses in Driver and Gray—there was a house sold on Raffles Road recently. Those things are turning around for us.

Quentin Kilian went on to say in the same ABC interview:

We do expect it to create a bigger uptake in the very near future ...

The most recent Treasury figures indicate that first home buyers have responded positively to the scheme, with 87 approved applications since September, 23 of those in Palmerston. Those existing homes are in the older suburbs. I also include Woodroffe, which is not in my electorate but in Blain. In those older suburbs there are 23 families or couples moving into the area. That is a great bonus to revitalise those suburbs and see children going to those schools to keep the schools vibrant.

These figures include 56 approvals for applications in the Darwin and Palmerston area. There are also approvals in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The reason the scheme has been so well received is understandable. Since September first home buyers purchasing established homes valued at \$650 000 or less have not had to pay any stamp duty on the first \$500 000 of their home's value. That figure pretty much covers all the homes in the Drysdale electorate. In dollar terms, that means first homebuyers are saving up to \$24 000 on stamp duty. That is a massive saving for anyone, let alone a young couple or first home buyers trying to get ahead.

In addition to savings on stamp duty, first homebuyers can take advantage of a \$10 000 renovation package to add some personal touches to their first property. What a lovely thing, for most of us who have bought or built a home, to know there is an additional \$10 000 if you buy an existing home to do up the bathroom, revamp the kitchen, paint or do some work on the veranda.

Included in the \$10 000 renovation package is a \$2000 component, which is available for the purchase of household goods from a Territory supplier. That is an incentive of up to \$34 000 to help first home buyers, but they will not be the only beneficiaries. This initiative will provide a shot in the arm for the real estate industry as well as the construction and retail sectors. I hope our package will also see more people spending more time in the Territory. When someone owns their home it helps to tie them to that location. What better place is there than the Territory to live, work and raise a family?

The Stamp Duty Amendment Bill will allow the government to backdate the legislation relating to our first home owner incentives to 1 September. This is another example of the Labor government fulfilling an election commitment.

Before the August poll we were well aware of the state of the economy, and we recognised how important it was to unlock the property market and, at the same time, halt the population drain affecting the Territory. From my point of view, in the Drysdale electorate, I do not want to see those electoral boundaries change; I want families to move back into those suburbs—to have large, vibrant suburbs where we have established infrastructure. You talk about having to build new schools; there are three wonderful schools in that electorate as well as a senior secondary college and a private school.

Let us encourage families to move to the suburbs where we already have high-quality infrastructure, with ovals and sporting fields as well as schools. This bill will make sure that money which would have otherwise gone to government in the form of stamp duty will instead go towards the deposit for first home buyers. Given that the average stamp duty on an established home is in the vicinity of \$20 000, it is a great way to help young families and people who otherwise could not enter the property market.

Like my colleagues, I want young people and families in the Territory to buy their first property, which is why I commend this bill to the House.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Territory Families): Madam Speaker, I support the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill. As the Minister for Territory Families I see this amendment as much more than an economic stimulus for the Territory; it is also a social mechanism to drive economic development.

Anyone who has run a business in the Territory will tell you it is terribly hard to retain good, skilled workers. I said as much last month when speaking in support of the Chief Minister's statement on jobs, specifically the decision to support NGOs with five-year funding streams as opposed to year-to-year piecemeal funding. My previous experience was as an employer while running the Alice Springs Women's Shelter for eight years—they are unfortunately not uncommon. It is a shared experience for many Territorian businesses.

The story tends to play out like this: you recruit a brand-new worker—shiny, fresh and excited to be in Central Australia—and they are thrilled to be in your organisation. You get some training support in place and invest in them, then your clients get to know them and customers get great service. Over time these workers become valued members of your team and they learn the intricacies of the business they work in and network throughout the community, as well as building strong business relationships and developing the social and intellectual capital that is essential to your business. Then, once we have invested in them, the worker, understandably, looks elsewhere, usually around the time when they meet a partner in Alice Springs or elsewhere in the Territory. They ask, 'Where can we settle? Where can I best be placed to raise my family?'

When they come to those decisions about where best to raise their family, we need them to say, 'The Northern Territory is the best place because I would not have these opportunities elsewhere in Australia'. We have to be realistic; our employment market is talent-led in many parts of the Territory. The Territory needs workers, perhaps more than they need the Territory. We need to invest in those valuable skills early so those people stay in the Territory. If we lose good people we not only lose the economic driver, but also their social and intellectual capital. This could end up as a serious brain drain in our social services; it is challenging work and we need the best skilled people we can get.

The challenge for this government is to be able to say, when we are making those decisions, that the Northern Territory is where we can achieve a great family lifestyle. That means investing in schools and a range of decisions. The Stamp Duty Amendment Bill gives us the opportunity to become a very attractive place to settle with your family.

You can have a great, stable job in the Territory. You can also have affordable, quality housing as we will now help you buy that first home, which is the very important first step into the property ladder. It is easy to see how this fits in with other parts of our social policy platform. I mentioned, education, but it is also about giving NGOs five-year contracts so there is certainty in work. If you pair those together it means we are investing in our social services in a very meaningful way.

It has been a real boom for the regional towns like Alice Springs and Katherine. The very early impact in Alice Springs has been very promising with 21 new grants being approved. When you think about that in a

town of around 28 000, that is a high number of houses to be turning over in a short period of time, and that is fantastic.

Even the *Alice Springs News Online* ran a story saying the demand for middle range homes had decreased threefold. It is important to acknowledge that along with the \$21 000 stamp duty relief, over \$200 000 worth of contracts will go into small businesses in the Alice Springs region, which is good news all round.

Before the election we were told very clearly that the previous government's changes to stamp duty had the most impact on regional centres. It especially had a devastating effect on the real estate market in Alice Springs. It was raised with me on many occasions, and every time Michael Gunner came to Alice Springs through the election campaign it was raised with him, so we listened and acted early and decisively in this government. That is a good example of what Labor parties do really well. It is about using a social mechanism to drive the economy, not just for a short-term boom but a change for generations. As the minister responsible for senior policy, I am aware that people who own their own homes are much better set up for retirement. For first home buyers, some of the benefit will come when these families are retiring.

Several women have come into my office who are renting, and they are really struggling with the transition from earning a wage into a pension without an asset behind them. This is long-term social policy that will have payoff benefits to the Territory in the future.

We need to put this into the context of many other parts of Australia where the dream of owning your own home is becoming unattainable. Rental cost figures and the unaffordability of housing in Sydney were on the TV this morning. We need to be clear that these are homes for families. Being able to drive affordable housing for families is a really important part of my role as Minister for Territory Families. It is clever social policy intertwined with smart economics.

I also want to develop the ideas of social outcomes that will evolve from this concession. The Member for Barkly will be very clear about housing being a key factor in increasing the social determinates of health. We are basically healthy when we do not have to worry about where we live. We have a strong housing policy that will be delivered through the hard work of the minister for Housing, but we also have to support another group of Territorians in making sure they become strong, healthy individuals and families that are part of strong communities, because when you buy a house you also buy into a community.

I was reflecting yesterday about the passion in the planning debate. There is passion in that debate because people are passionate about where they live and their homes. If you have a community of short-term renters you do not have that passion or sense of community. We all lose if we do not have people who are invested in our community. People live happier, productive lives if they feel part of somewhere and have a sense of place and community.

Our government is committed to people-centred policies where equity is crucial to everything we do. By increasing opportunities for home ownership we are collectively increasing the value of our social and economic policies. This amendment will increase home ownership, which will flow into the other determinants of health not only by those participating in the program, but those around them. If people stay we have more stable workforces. People who need a service then receive better service and we have better schools with better teachers. It has flow-on effects to our whole community.

I also want to speak about some other parts of my portfolio that are impacted by this policy; this includes areas of social inclusion. We have a vibrant multicultural community in the Northern Territory and many of them have not had the opportunity to buy a house since they arrived in our country. This is about increasing diversity and opportunities. Migrants contribute strongly to our local workforce and strengthen our economy through their high levels of participation in employment. We must not forget the skills and qualifications they bring to our community, along with their incredible food. I tend to focus on food when talking about multicultural communities.

It is important to know that it is not just a simple construct. When we go to the markets we have a sense of belonging in a diverse and interesting place that is home to many people. Many studies show this; it is not rocket science. When we interact positively while sharing food it gives us a sense of community. We can encourage our new Territorians to invest in being part of the Territory and, as the Chief Minister often says, owning their own little piece of the Territory. That is an important part of this policy.

We also need to keep our young people in the Territory. Big city living can look pretty shiny, but after a couple of months of hour-long commutes to work each way, the Territory lifestyle soon becomes very appealing, and the freedom to go fishing on the weekend and play sport. That is all very important. Also, if

young professionals know this is the best way for them to invest in their future—the first important rung on the property ladder—then we are more likely to get our kids back here after they finish university, or we can encourage them to go to university in Darwin, because they know there is a strong and positive future here for them.

The Stamp Duty Amendment Bill is a win for all Territorians. It supports families, young Territorians, new and multicultural Territorians, and, most importantly, the opportunity for affordable homes.

I support this bill for all its social outcomes and benefits to Territorians, which I have already mentioned. I also want to highlight the benefits to my electorate of Braitling. We have very few opportunities in Braitling to build new housing. There are many existing homes, as the Member for Drysdale said, that need refreshing. Twenty-one applications have been granted and that says it all, and I congratulate each of those 21 people on acquiring their first home. Owning a house in the Territory is a great thing.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Braitling for her comments. I also support the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill. First and foremost I congratulate the Chief Minister, Michael Gunner; the Deputy Chief Minister, Nicole Manison; and all the hard-working public servants in the Northern Territory Government, who have tirelessly worked since the election to implement the new Territory First Home Owner Grant scheme.

I am very fortunate to have met many people and families in the Brennan community, some of whom own small businesses. I believe small businesses are the backbone of our local economy. These people and their families have put their hearts and souls into the Northern Territory by investing in its future and holding their corner when the going gets tough.

When I listened to the people of Brennan who own various businesses, one of the key factors that kept arising was housing and the cost of living in the Northern Territory. I remember a middle-aged man in Gunn, who was running a local family finance company. He, with many others, stated that we needed to bring back the first home owner scheme for existing homes, as the situation under the previous CLP government was not supporting local businesses or people.

I am proud to say that the Territory Labor government took this advice not only from the Brennan residents and small businesses, but from many Territorians saying the same thing to their Labor candidates, who, to their credit—and I am very pleased to say many of my colleagues here today, as MLAs—also advocated for the new Territory first home buyer scheme.

I am very pleased to say this first home buyer scheme began on 1 September 2016, only five days after the election. This first home buyer scheme will unlock our housing market and allow all Territorians to purchase existing homes. It will support and grow our Territory economy, our local businesses and the families that live here. It will keep Territorians and their families in the Territory and, most importantly, will give our Territory families their very first home.

I remember buying my first home in Alice Springs in the early 1990s, with my partner and three young children. We could not afford a new house, so existing housing would always be our only option. We worked hard and saved. It always seemed a dream too far away. As the years went by, we finally had enough to purchase a standard, three-bedroom, basic brick house from Territory Housing. The house needed a lot of work, but it is now our home, our castle, and we could not be happier.

I remember that time; it was one of our most exciting times as a family. It was becoming a reality; we were purchasing a house we could call home for our children, which we could refurbish and where my family could always feel safe and secure. This same excitement and security rang true with the people and families in Brennan when I mentioned the first home buyer scheme. Their eyes lit up and their minds explored how they could be part of this great Australian dream.

I quote a poem written by Mr Francis Duggan called *The Great Australian Dream*:

*To own your own home in a suburban housing estate
Or to watch the captain of your favourite team
Raise the trophy aloft after the A.F.L Grand Final siren
It's all part of the great Australian dream.*

*To cheer the Aussie cricketers in victory
And against the English watch them reign supreme*

*And to celebrate with your mates at the local
It's all part of the great Australian dream.*

*To watch your team win the Rugby League Grand Final
A dream you thought that never would come true
And in the club rooms you celebrate all evening
And the happiest man in all of the World is you.*

*To watch your son in his first game of football
Whilst others tell you how well he can play
And you feel proud and the thought to you is pleasing
That your son might be a super star one day.*

*To see your daughter receive her diploma
And you tell your mates about her great success
A moment you'll remember in the future
This moment that brought you such happiness.*

*To own your own home in a suburban housing estate
And to watch your young son the best player in his team
And to cheer the Aussie cricketers to victory
It's just all part of the great Australian dream.*

The great Australian dream is still alive and it is just as exciting. It reminds me of those special days with my young family when we purchased our home. It is such a happy memory, one that some in this Chamber may also share and think about today, when you purchased your great Australian dream.

It pleases me so much that this government supports our people and that families come first. This government believes in its people and wants to make Territory family dreams, and Australian dreams, come true. It pleases me even more to know that at the start of these government sittings, noting that the government has only been in for 88 days, 92 first home buyer scheme applications have been submitted, with 87 of those now approved and five pending. Of the 87 approved applications, 36 are in Darwin, 23 are in Palmerston, 21 are in Alice Springs, three are in the rural area, three are in Katherine and one is in Tennant Creek. What an achievement.

This government has only been in for 88 days and we have 92 first home buyer scheme applications. That is more than one a day; that is fantastic. Territory families will now be living the great Australian dream and I could not be happier for them.

Of the 23 Palmerston families engaged in the first home buyer scheme, five of them are from my electorate of Brennan. I know these families; they have worked hard. They have young children and deserve all the support they have received from our government's first home buyer scheme to purchase their first home. I congratulate these families, and I know of more families in Brennan who will take advantage of the first home buyer scheme, which is the best the Territory has ever had.

I thank the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, honourable members and ministers who believed in and supported this first home buyer scheme. I thank the Territory business community for its advocacy and for supporting this initiative, and for holding its corner in the tough times. I thank the public servants, who put their shoulder to the wheel to get the first home buyer scheme operational five days after the election. I thank the people of Brennan and the Territorians who have trusted the Labor government to help make their great Australian dream come true.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill, which was introduced by the Treasurer as a measure to support Territorians to fulfil the dream of owning their own home.

A home is a safe haven, a place where families and individuals are sheltered and protected, where everyday people can create a place they feel comfortable in each time they step into their front yard. Whilst this feeling of comfort can be achieved in many instances, the freedom to do so can be much easier if a person owns their own home.

This topic is close to my heart; a scheme similar to the one proposed by the Treasurer enabled me to purchase my home in 2006. Ever since I scored a job as a checkout chick in Woolworths at the age of 15, I

have dreamed of owning my own home. In 2005 I was one of many Territorians at the time who was able to access a stamp duty concession that was offered by the NT Government to buy my home.

Being a homeowner has taught me more responsibility than any other endeavour I have undertaken. It has also provided me with stability, security and safety. My home is my greatest asset. Paying my mortgage allows me to undertake a long-term saving strategy, which will help to set me up financially when I reach retirement age. My parents understood this; they led the way by buying their own home and they encouraged my siblings and me to do the same.

There are many other individuals, families and couples who deserve the same opportunities I was afforded. We as a government must take the necessary steps to support Territorians to buy their own home. I have a number of friends and family members who purchased their home around the same time I did, which was fantastic as we were able to share ideas and advice about being new homeowners and how to look after and add value to our properties. We were also able to vent to and support one another through the challenges and benefits of home ownership, of which there were many.

A few years after I purchased my home there was a steady increase in house prices. Homes became unaffordable for many of the residents I spoke with, and it often left residents feeling like owning their own piece of the Territory was out of reach. During this time I heard many stories of two or more families living together under the same roof. It suited some families in some instances. It was mainly as a result of keeping their children and grandchildren close to them and supporting them by making sure they had a roof over their heads. I was also told of families who chose to put money into their investment to expand their home to accommodate their family members, as they were not in a position to support their children to buy their own home.

The Stamp Duty Amendment Bill 2016 enables first home owners to be supported through a range of measures. It is great to see that homeowners who want to purchase an existing home, just like I did, will not miss out this time around. It is fantastic that we are not only supporting first home owners to purchase a new or existing home through stamp duty assistance, but we are also supporting homeowners to purchase household goods and undertake renovations to existing homes. This extra assistance will be extremely helpful.

There are many people living in the Karama electorate who would like to buy their own home, and families have communicated to me the importance of long-term planning for their children's future. The Karama electorate is made up of a diverse range of community members, many of whom have lived in the area since the suburbs of Malak and Karama were first created more than 30 years ago. These residents have witnessed the creation of our suburbs, from the development of Malak and Karama shopping centres to our schools and parks. These residents have many stories about how different life was when they first moved to the area more than three decades ago. It was fantastic for me to be able to relive my childhood memories of growing up in Malak in the 1980s with these residents.

The message of home ownership and subsequent longevity in my electorate resonates loudly. You can feel the sense of community that exists in these areas where long-time residents still reside today. These residents encourage community togetherness and communication. They help to look after one another and, more importantly, improve our community. I feel lucky to have so many of these long-time residents living in my electorate, working every day to make our community a wonderful place to live.

During my campaign I spoke with many residents who were looking to sell their homes, with many properties on the market for longer than three months. I was quite surprised and disheartened to see how many properties still displayed 'For Sale' signs on their front fence as I walked around the community. One resident I spoke with told me she had been trying to sell her home for close to six months. She was told by her real estate agent that her asking price was too high and she would need to lower it significantly in order to sell her home. This resident has lived in her home for close to two decades. She has renovated it and established a beautiful garden, and it is in a great location. She was frustrated at this advice and so was I.

When I asked homeowners why their homes were still up for sale after so long, the response seemed the same. The housing market was geared towards buyers not sellers. The interest of home buyers was not adequate at that time. This left many residents frustrated, and many people were looking forward to us introducing this scheme.

When speaking with community members who have aspirations of buying their own home, I was told by many that their preference was to buy an existing home in the northern suburbs. They were familiar with

the area because they grew up and spent a lot of time there, they have family and friends in the area and they want to live close to the amenities they frequent.

My eyes were recently opened to the positive impact this legislation amendment can have, when a close friend of mine told me her story. Earlier this year she said she would be voting for Labor at the August election because she wants to buy her own home to ensure that she and her child have a place to call their own. My friend wants a secure, safe, stable environment in which she can raise her child for as long as she wants. She wants to set herself up financially, and she was excited about Labor announcing its election commitment. As the Member for Brennan mentioned, we were able to bring this to life five days after the election closed. She now has the opportunity to apply to make her dream of home ownership come true for her and her child.

We, the Northern Territory Government, listened to Territorians. The message is clear. Territorians want to buy their own piece of the Territory. This is evident through the 92 applications received for the purchase of existing homes since this measure was introduced. I congratulate the 87 applicants whose applications have already been approved.

It would be great for more of our new residents to own a piece of this wonderful Territory, and it would be even more wonderful for our local economy to be boosted through the purchase of whitegoods and renovations. When Territorians invest in their own home they invest in their community and the Territory, which is why I am pleased to support this bill.

Mrs WORDEN (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I, too, support the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill 2016, introduced by the Treasurer, and the timing of the delivery of this very important election commitment.

The Territory is a place of complexity; it is a place you can come to work hard and get ahead, but it is also a place where you can find it very tough. Over the last 20-plus years, like so many of my friends, I have experienced both these scenarios, but one main driver to stay was that we could crack into the first home buyer market, buy an old place, fix her up and then watch that investment grow over the years. That is what so many of us have done.

It took me until I was 30 to achieve this, after many years of listening to my children—who are now grown and, thankfully, in their own homes—whinging and carrying on about not being able to put up a hook because the rental agent would not allow it, or having to move every now and again because the owner of the home wanted you out, or not being able to have a pool because the rent was so expensive. I spent years listening to that.

I will always remember the feeling of purchasing on that final settlement day; there is nothing better than that. Over the last four years unless you were able to stump up your deposit and stamp duty, which could collectively be as much as \$50 000, you could not achieve this dream. I can remember not only going without many things over several years, but also squirrelling away every tax return for many years to scrape together about \$20 000 for our first home deposit on an ex-housing commission fixer-upper, and it was an absolute killer.

It is an important role for any government to make the Territory an attractive place to stay, work and raise a family. We hear that all the time, but it is so much sweeter if you can stay and buy your own piece of paradise. I think most of us look at our young people and wonder how hard it will be for them to buy their first home in the future. My grown-up children would not have had the opportunities they ended up having; they went interstate, and one of them overseas, for the opportunity to buy their own place.

I hear people talk about the Territory needing to be more like Singapore. That is all very well if you are only speaking about the aesthetics, but if you include their broader housing situation, driven by a lack of land and high costs, then I could not disagree more strongly. I would hate to see a situation here where intergenerational loans are a part of the norm for our new homebuyers and a part of our children's future reality.

It is already tough for young people and all first home buyers to get into the market, as they are the lowest wage earners—I heard a couple of other people say that—in our society and with the rental costs being incredibly high. That is why it is hard to fathom why the previous government made it even harder by only allowing stamp duty concessions on new homes. It clearly only supported one sector of our construction industry while it neglected others.

As I represent one of the older northern suburb areas, the impact of that policy decision is crystal clear across Sanderson, as it was outlined for some of the older places, even Palmerston. Over my 10-month campaign there was visual evidence in every one of the four Sanderson suburbs that the previous policy had a devastating effect: homes with 'For Sale' signs up for the entire campaign period; homes for sale and then taken off the market because they could not be sold; and homes for sale left empty and often in an unkempt state because their owners had to leave for work opportunities elsewhere and could neither sell nor rent their properties before their departure date. That is a very sad state of affairs.

While I was doorknocking, these homeowners, some of whom were older Territorians who had lived in the area for up to 40 years, told me about their desires to downsize, move into a retirement village or simply move to be closer to family, but they could not sell their homes as a good percentage of their potential buyers were effectively locked out or discouraged from purchasing an established home. In one case a homeowner had their property on the market for over 12 months and had to reduce the sale price by \$75 000—a massive loss on what was effectively a big chunk of their super—just to make a sale. All that time they could have moved to be closer to their children during their retirement and enjoyed life with their grandchildren. What an unnecessarily worrisome time for them.

Another flow-on effect of the short-sighted policy saw school numbers in our local areas affected as young families were encouraged to build in areas like Palmerston. There is nothing wrong with Palmerston; there are great areas, but no areas with such established services as the Sanderson electorate. I have been to school councils where they are now discussing the subsequent low numbers of young children attending.

Families have been split. It is no longer easy to purchase around the corner from mum and dad and extended family. We know how important those people are for support in your life when you really need it. It often results in our kids leaving the Territory to find a place where they can earn a living and buy a cheaper home close to established community infrastructure and support services. As I said, it was a very short-sighted policy.

I am also certain we have overlooked the aspirations of the home handyman in this debate. Many people do not want their first home to be a new one. Many, like my father, had a certain perverse joy in taking something old and bringing it back to its former glory. Throughout my childhood my parents bought and sold old homes that had been neglected, and, whenever he was home, my dad could be found with a hammer, screwdriver or saw in hand, fixing something. I think he is responsible for my love of freshly-sawn wood and the smell of paint, which is fortunate for me now, being married to a painter.

The old policy would have put in place a barrier for many handy persons who wish to achieve this dream in their first home. It is not only my assessment of the previous government's decision; we heard earlier from the Member for Drysdale about what the REINT had to say recently. On 22 April this year the REINT lamented that house sales in the March quarter had plummeted to the lowest level in 17 years. They knew that scrapping grants to first home buyers of existing homes was a big part of the problem, and they said it was one of the biggest game changers that happened over the last 12 to 15 months. The former Chief Minister's response was that housing had become more affordable since his government's changes, but there is no point in housing being more affordable if there is a significant reduction in buyers and in the value of most homeowners' asset value.

Yes, supply had gone up, but so had the vacancy rate. Some were being left vacant as Territorians left in droves over the last four years. Whilst new home build numbers went up, those homes were in areas that did not have established services, which caused a large, earlier than necessary population sprawl. That does not represent the real growth of our city. People should have had a choice to purchase a new or existing home and not be penalised for choosing either.

Territory Labor listened and has acted. It is no wonder the Labor government's election commitment to increase the stamp duty discount for first home buyers of established homes was so welcomed. The uptake figure—I am quoting from yesterday, so there may be some new figures today—was 87 approvals. That was quoted by the minister yesterday in Question Time. It is a strong indicator that the introduction of this change on 1 September this year was welcomed with open arms by the community.

Not having to find up to \$24 000 of stamp duty allows potential buyers to put all their savings into the deposit, which is already difficult to find if you are paying high rent. I know of a young married couple who managed to buy their first home—they bucked the trend—in Sanderson, but they had to avoid this very scenario by moving back in with their parents, with young children in tow, for a number of years. I cannot imagine doing that. I do not think my parents would have let me. It is admirable that families are prepared to do this, but imagine what \$24 000 in stamp duty concession would have done for that family. Had they

been able to wait a further six months—they must be kicking themselves—they could also have had access to an additional incentives, which provides me a nice segue into that area of observation. This excellent incentive is part of a complete package to entice first home buyers into the market.

Buying a house can be the biggest and most stressful decision and commitment of your entire lifetime. It was for me. It is important to provide as many incentives as possible. As we have heard the Treasurer say repeatedly, if they buy here they are more likely to stay and make the Territory their home. The \$10 000 home renovation package is one such incentive. Whilst the opposition members might jump up and down about their last minute, pre-election, ill-conceived, vote-grabbing \$2000 scheme, this is far too small an incentive to make a buyer purchase an existing home if it needs a new kitchen or bathroom. My mum always said they were the two essentials of any home.

If you are looking at a house and it has a run-down bathroom, will you buy that while you have young kids? You will possibly move on to the next one or buy a new home as an alternative because that is where the incentives lay. The ability to put in a new \$10 000 bathroom could be the difference for a young, small family buying an existing property, which then allows another family to trade up to a bigger home and so on. Whilst \$2000 might have some tradies undertaking small jobs, \$10 000 gives local tradies an opportunity to undertake a complete job. Let us not forget that this package also allows up to \$2000 to be spent on household goods, making the transition into a new home easier. It will also support hard-working local household goods suppliers through the tough economic times that we know are coming.

I commend the Treasurer for continuing to allow first home buyers of new homes to receive \$26 000 under the First Home Owner Grant scheme, as well as being able to receive \$2000 for household goods that the purchasers of existing homes can also enjoy.

I look forward to welcoming young people and first home buyers back into the Sanderson electorate over the next four years, and I commend the bill to the House.

VISITORS
Bakewell Primary School

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise of the presence in the gallery of two Year 5 classes from Bakewell Primary School, accompanied by their teachers, Brianna Grazioli, Sandra Holland, Kimberley Drew and Amanda Sullivan. On behalf of members, welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy your time here.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I also draw your attention to the presence in the gallery of Ken Simpson, who is a former Commissioner for Public Employment. Welcome to Parliament House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be the Housing minister with Michael Gunner's Labor government and to support the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill.

It is worthwhile reflecting on contemporary history, since I have been here for a short time. I will start with the Top End. Reflecting on 2006, we started to see rapid development in the greater Darwin area. That directly related to a new resource, which was offshore oil and gas, and it generated many service industries. Consequently, what came with that was housing pressure and stress because many people were moving to the Northern Territory. The Labor government of the day reacted to that and started record land release across the greater Darwin area.

It is important for constituents and members of this House to realise what it entails when government puts up \$20m to service Crown land and attract developers to try to keep land prices down. It was not an easy exercise; it was a mammoth one, and I was privileged to work with the experts in that land release.

It was important that the government from 2008 to 2012 did not stop at the Top End. The land release policies continued into the regions because it was a holistic decision to develop the whole of the Territory. I was very proud to be part of a team that delivered new releases in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice

Springs, particularly with the master plan suburb of Kilgariff, which, in potential partnership with NT Airports, has the capacity to supply Alice Springs with good serviced land over many decades. That was the nature of the Territory at the time.

In 2012 the Territory went to an election and the Country Liberal Party was elected. It consequently inherited those land release programs and continued them—nothing new. I spent four years listening to the abuse that used to come across the Chamber. They were the same names, the same releases, the same programs and, God love them, they continued that good work.

I could not understand their policy deficit when they chose to cut the stamp duty discount for existing dwellings. It did not make sense because it was holistic policy—running parallel—on getting Territorians into their first home, stabilising the population and growing the regions. It came as a bit of a shock until you explored the liberalist economic rationalism of ‘cut, cut, cut’.

Looking at the budget papers, by the time we got to 2013-14, you can see it is well documented that the CLP government of the day had made savings of up to \$30m due to the policy position of not allowing stamp duty concession for Territory families wanting to purchase existing dwellings. That was significant cash in the bank which made budget papers look better, and it gave some oxygen to the rhetoric of the then government about being responsible and what have you. Seriously, it was purely a paper exercise and Territorians were hurting.

Large groups of Territory residents were denied access into their first home. We can attribute the significant population decrease in the Northern Territory to all sorts of reasons over the last four years, but we cannot deny that lack of access to housing was part of it. All up about 8000 Territorians left and went down south in the last four years. Members would appreciate the significant impact on the overall economy when you experience population decline of that measure. Labor assessed this over the four years and debated it thoroughly. There was support from Independent members on the cross bench, particularly from the Member for Araluen regarding Alice Springs and the regions. We jumped on board and supported that and it ended up in a very good policy that is now part of a legislative passage which will create a significant opportunity for Territory families.

It is important to look at the First Home Owner Grant in the context of the Territory economy because it is an economic stimulus program. Members have shared their own personal experiences, including me. When you live in a small town you see people buying their first home, which is an existing dwelling, and you see them shopping in the hardware store, at the nursery and engaging local trades. Consequently the Labor policy, which was applauded by Territorians in the last election, supplies a very important \$10 000 grant to support that. The Member for Sanderson summed it up beautifully when she talked about her personal experience with upgrading bathrooms and kitchens, some of the key functional areas in the home, to support her young family.

This policy made a lot of sense to Territorians. It reopened the market; it favours the regions, and we can see the overall objective of stabilising the Territory population, making sure people feel good about the Territory and stay here. That economic stimulus is a great outcome of this very important bill to amend the stamp duty legislation.

A component of that stimulus package relates to whitegoods, and I applaud the Treasurer, the Chief Minister and the Labor members, who worked tirelessly and intensely on the policy development over the term in opposition, especially over the last 12 months. The sale of whitegoods stimulates the local economy. I can tell you the names of the stores in Tennant Creek that will benefit, and they put their hands up. People with good fridges, cooking implements and entertainment units in their homes for their kids will benefit. It supports good family life and is available with this policy.

The big picture for me, now given the very important task of heading up housing in the Northern Territory, is the progression we adhere to, the basic policy and ethos around housing. That is, firstly, addressing homelessness. From homelessness, government offers that first step into public housing. From public housing it is the learning journey; it is about the holistic experience of community; it is, as members have shared in their personal stories, a time to consolidate your wealth, make your savings and aim for the next step.

In the Northern Territory we have a very supportive step, which is into social and affordable housing. For those clients the logical next step is into the private market. It makes a lot of sense to me, in relation to being charged with the delivery of this policy, that there will be lots of opportunities for Territorians to

purchase an existing dwelling and work on it to create a family home and make sure it is part of community development.

Going on the road recently to a remote area and talking to local people—it was Milikapiti. Once again, I thank the Member for Arafura for hosting that visit and facilitating my knowledge not only as a Territorian, but as a minister with a very privileged position. People in Milikapiti asked me how they can buy their own home; it was fantastic. There were two people there and they wanted to know how they could take the next step to home ownership. I was so proud to tell them that this government will support that. I was able to say, 'That is a really interesting coincidence because we are going into parliament to support the Treasurer to amend the stamp duty legislation that will facilitate you buying an existing dwelling'.

We then had a very interesting conversation about finances. I encouraged those people to shop around because there will be some access to good financial plans; they have the opportunity to buy existing dwellings and we hope it all goes to plan because home ownership in the bush is just as important as in town.

It is good legislation; it has great support from this side of the House and it was pleasing to hear the Leader of the Opposition mention that the opposition will not oppose the legislation. It has also been a good debate—listening to Territorians telling their story. I also commend the Member for Brennan; the poem was very inspiring. It characterised the Australian dream. With what the government is doing in regional and remote housing and the massive deficit that has been created over decades—it is exactly that; it is about the Australian dream. All Territorians share this dream.

Housing will support health, education, families and employment, and generate healthy communities. It is one piece of infrastructure in our society that can underpin good, solid and sustainable community development. This legislation is in essence about supporting Territorians.

I thank the Treasurer for bringing this forward and for the work she has done on this. Thanks to the other members as well, and I am sure there will be more to hear. I enjoy listening to good, constructive debate in this House.

Ms MOSS (Environment and Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to the debate on the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill 2016. I also commend the Treasurer for bringing this forward. We can all agree that it is an exceptionally important debate which we have had for some time, in many different forms, over my term as the Member for Casuarina.

This commitment to providing more support to first home buyers has been very well received in my electorate. I appreciate that my colleagues have spoken about their necks of the woods and told stories of Territorians who have struggled to get their feet on the ladder in the Territory. The Chief Minister talks a lot about Territorians being able to own their own piece of the Territory. This is about a longer-term view for the people of the Northern Territory. It is economically important. We need to support Territorians so they stay, study, work, grow their businesses and raise their families here. This is important legislation that we are debating.

In my electorate of Casuarina the changes made by the former government to first home owner support—it was whittled back to new homes only. That presented a bit of difficulty at that time as not too many new homes were being built. It narrowed down the options for people who were looking for their first home to get their feet on the ladder.

There are some major hubs in my electorate, including the Royal Darwin Hospital and Charles Darwin University. It is a major retail and business hub. Many families living in my electorate have lived there for decades. The Member for Sanderson was talking about Territorians being able to live in the neighbourhoods and communities they grew up in, down the road from mum and dad, and close to major health services they may need to access for appointments on a regular basis, which many of my constituents do. These things are important to Territorians. Some of the changes that occurred over the last few years, under the CLP government, changed and narrowed those options for people to buy homes that were close to their families and the services they needed.

Much of what the Member for Sanderson pointed out resonated with me. Our electorates are very close to one another. There are many beautiful old homes that people want to have the choice to buy and fix up to create their own family home.

The loss of population in the NT has been a major issue for us for some time. We have turned our minds to that in a major way as a government, and many of the initiatives we have talked about are a way of addressing the population drain. We want people to stay here. Our population growth comes down to our birth rate. We need to look at this issue where, for a range of reasons, people decide they want to leave the Territory, whether it is because they feel they cannot buy their first home here or that they want to access opportunities down south. We need to make sure those opportunities are available here. We want to keep Territory families here.

The former government members spoke about affordable housing, as the Member for Sanderson was very articulate about in her contribution to the debate. Many people just were not buying here. As the previous shadow minister for Housing I introduced in a motion—the Member for Nelson discussed that debate—wanting the former government to come to this Chamber with options for how we could further incentivise home ownership for first home buyers and provide them with support.

The Member for Araluen has been very passionate about this issue for some time with regard to first home owners in her electorate in Alice Springs. She has contributed to debate in that context for quite some time.

The Member for Drysdale spoke about the comments made by the REINT in relation to home sales in the Northern Territory. It was discussed at one of the pre-election budget debates earlier in the year. We are talking about key factors that have been listed by REINT regarding the situation with home ownership, such as population growth, decline in economic activity and the flow-on effect of the withdrawal of incentives for first home owners. I think it is important to reiterate these points. We are talking about a major organisation in the Northern Territory that has been outspoken about the impacts of former decisions on home ownership in the Northern Territory. We have seen a decline in home ownership and it is important that we address these issues, as the Treasurer has been putting her mind to.

Eighty-seven approved applications since September is an outstanding result—87 Territorians who are well on their way to owning their own homes in the Territory. Had I not been able to access support to buy an existing home I would not be in the little townhouse I share with my partner. It was vital for us to get support to buy our first home, which is where we still live. We saved very hard, but it made a difference for us. We need to acknowledge that the incentives that existed in the past have been a great helping hand for many Territorians. We need to continue to look at the ways we are keeping Territory families here.

Out of 87 approved applications there are 36 in Darwin, 23 in Palmerston, 21 in Alice Springs, three in Katherine and one in Tennant Creek, which is excellent news, and there are five pending. What an exciting and special time for those families. It is a great moment when you purchase your own home and can put a nail in the wall or paint without having to ask permission to do it. It is a really big life step for Territory families and it is exciting that it has been so warmly received.

The Member for Johnston and I held a community barbecue last week in Alawa, where people were talking to us about these issues. 'How do we access it? Can we get some more information on how we access it?' It is exciting for me because it means the families in Alawa, Nakara, Tiwi, Brinkin and Lyons are looking at ways they can stay in the electorate.

Their kids are going to our local schools and they are really active community members, and I am excited for them when I hear that kind of talk. They are welcoming this initiative and looking at ways to purchase their own homes and stay in our electorate for a long time to come. I look forward to getting the information out even more broadly in my electorate because it is being well received.

The Home Improvement Scheme warrants a mention. We were very up front about the scheme before the election. We wanted to target our spending on a longer-term view, and the priority is keeping Territorians in the Territory and addressing the population drain.

The Leader of the Opposition has been ramping up on things that are short term. The opposition had no long-term view or solutions for keeping Territorians here. It was too little too late. We are addressing a broader issue, providing opportunities for Territorians to own their own homes. That is commendable. We were up front with Territorians all the way through and we continue to be so. Eighty-seven applications with five pending is a brilliant sign that people are taking to this initiative very well and appreciate the additional support to own their own homes.

Those who are looking to buy their own existing homes of a value of up to \$650 000 save on stamp duty for the first \$500 000 of their home. The \$10 000 renovation package, with \$2000 towards household goods

for local suppliers, is an excellent initiative. It is a great way to make sure we are driving business into our local businesses. It is allowing people to still undertake renovations on their homes.

You can have a home improvement scheme that the Chief Minister can access, as can I, as has been pointed out previously—we can all access it, and that is great—or you can say, ‘You know what? There is no point cutting out all the people who cannot access the scheme because they do not own their own homes.’ How good would it be if we could actually get Territorians into their own homes? How good would it be if we had Territorians, in the long term, buying their own homes and being able to undertake work on their own homes. It is about a longer-term view and keeping people in the Territory.

When I was doorknocking in the campaign cycle, which we all went through, one of the biggest issues that was raised with me throughout that period was home ownership and the cost of living, wanting to be able to stay in the Territory. ‘How do I purchase my own home and will you do anything about the fact I cannot buy an existing home anymore?’ That was changed by the former government. It was great to be able to say to them that we had a plan to help people purchase existing homes.

I am glad to hear the opposition will not be opposing this bill today. I think that is very sensible and Territorians can see that; they are excited by it. For many young families and people who are looking to purchase their principal place of residence this is such an important initiative. It allows people to have more options to stay in the Territory, live close to mum and dad or live near the hospital and health services. It gives people options in the Territory to purchase their own home, and that is what we are about.

I commend the Treasurer for her swift work on this issue. The election was on 27 August and we have received 87 applications since September. That is fantastic and I look forward to watching those numbers grow because, inevitably, they will. It is particularly exciting that Alice Springs has received 21 applications; That is fantastic. We will see them grow as word gets out that this is a scheme that works. It is easily accessible; options and support are available to you if you want to buy an existing home. You will not be locked out of half of Darwin; you have the option to look at the older suburbs of Darwin like mine, Sanderson or Johnston, where new homes are not going up at a rate of knots. That is not to say that people do not want to buy the new houses in Palmerston, but there are lots of great new homes in Lyons and Muirhead, and there will be across the Territory.

There are still incentives there for first home buyers who want to buy new homes. That is really important. It has not gone away, but we need to make sure we support a whole manner of Territorians who want to continue to raise their families here in the Territory, as we all do. I do not have kids yet, but when I do I want to make sure they have the opportunity to get on the property ladder, stay here, enjoy the best of the Territory, as I have done, and make the most of the opportunities here with work, development, learning and connection to this beautiful place.

We live in a really special place. It is sad when we hear from Territorians who do not want to leave but feel that they have to for various reasons. Let us get down to addressing why people are leaving and get serious about it. People love the Territory, and this is a fantastic initiative.

I commend the Treasurer on her work, and I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MANISON (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I thank all the members of the Assembly who have contributed to this important debate about home ownership, population growth and supporting the economy and the future of the Northern Territory.

Buying your first home is one of the most significant events in your life. I put it up there with marriage and having your first child. It is a big plunge when you buy your first home. It is a huge and important commitment, the type of commitment that will set you up financially, ideally, in most cases, for the rest of your life. It is the type of commitment that gives you a sense of place, independence, control, security and wellbeing in your life. I have heard mentioned a few times in the debate the overall understanding of how secure housing enhances your wellbeing going forward. It is a really important step.

After the change of government we could see there were significant changes to first home ownership policy in the Northern Territory, especially policy targeted at established homes. There was a big emphasis on stimulating construction of new housing through the changes the previous government made, but it did not need to be at the detriment of the established housing market. We saw significant changes and there was a slowing in the real estate market here for established homes. We heard that loud and clear from the Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory, which has been strongly advocating for these changes to ensure a

greater turnover in the property market, giving first home owners the opportunity to get into the housing market.

If you cast your mind back to the time you purchased your first home—a new home is not for everyone. It is not necessarily available to everyone. In some cases in the Northern Territory it is more difficult to find new housing options that are available to first home owners. For many first home owners it takes a lot to save, especially if you are on a single income, and not a particularly high one. You need the option to buy an established home. It could be a one-bedroom unit in Stuart Park that is your step onto the ladder and into the housing market. For some people it may be a two-bedroom unit in Alice Springs. Other people may have the capacity to buy a three-bedroom home in Wulagi. You need options and it is important to open these options up to people, otherwise you are locking them out of the housing market. That is exactly what we saw and it had a big impact on people.

Going to the Territory election we listened to Territorians. It has been heartening to listen to members speak about their experiences within their electorates. We received consistent feedback across the Territory about the concerns of first home owners getting into the housing market. We had a very clear policy for first home buyers, going into the election. I am pleased to say the very first ministerial I signed was to enable the stamp duty legislation that we are debating today to come into this parliament, and to bring forward these important changes to home ownership for first home buyers in the Northern Territory. We listened, made the changes and are making sure they get through legislatively, even though the scheme has been in place since 1 September.

We are pleased with the uptake of the scheme. As you have heard, we have received 92 applications of which 87 have been approved—36 in Darwin, 23 in Palmerston, 21 in Alice Springs, three in the rural area, three in Katherine and one in Tennant Creek. We have had several more inquiries, so it has been a good uptake.

It is important to remember that up to \$24 000 is provided in stamp duty relief. That applies to the first \$500 000 of a home with a value of no more than \$650 000. For a first home owner, that price point is there. It still seems quite high, but the advice is that with \$650 000 people can show they have the capacity—as we know, a bank will not lend you money unless you can repay it.

In the interim, to ensure a smooth transition, we maintained the previous government's first home buyer concession of \$10 000 for established homes up to the value of \$700 000 to 31 December. We did not cut it off straightaway. We made sure there was a transition period for those who may have been in the process of buying their own home. We have only had one person fall into that category so far. It was important to make sure we had a transition period because we want to make sure we get people into their own homes.

Another element we have maintained in the first home owners' market is the \$26 000 grant for people wishing to construct a new home. Within my electorate I have a mix—I have a brand-new suburb and first home buyers want to be able to build their own home. A grant of \$26 000 goes a very long way. Zuccoli is a classic example; there are some fantastic first home opportunities for people to get into the housing market and build a brand-new home in Palmerston.

It is wonderful to see that we have a better balance than the previous government; we have the new and the established. We are not saying it is one or the other; we are trying to support both sectors. I received feedback from many constituents prior to the election; they said not only were first home buyers asking about home owner grants for the area, but people trying to sell their established home. I also received many enquiries from people who were trying to sell their property, which was ideal for a first home buyer to go in and build a new home. It was not necessarily just for the benefit of first home buyers, but for second or third home buyers because they had had their time in their established homes. They had built up their equity and were ready to buy and build new homes, which creates turnover in the market. We heard a lot about the fact people wanted choice. That is exactly what we have tried to deliver.

We have heard from the opposition with regard to the Home Improvement Scheme versus the home renovation package. We have been very clear about the home renovation package targeting first home buyers to give them extra incentive to take the plunge and get into the market and their own home. Ninety-two applications is almost \$1m in stimulus that will be going out the door across the Northern Territory. We are providing people extra help to get into the market. Some established homes are not very new; they will need some love and care. It is a huge help when you can do some painting and fix the fencing and the kitchen taps. Those types of things go a very long way to making your house a home.

I listened carefully to the Member for Nelson, who raised some questions on his concerns about inflationary pressures. They were considered as part of this and were looked at by Treasury, which said that with stamp duty concessions and that type of relief there is far less inflationary pressure. Grants in this space would, however, have been a different matter.

Current population growth issues and property prices were considered but not seen to be something that would push the housing market up at a rapid rate. I received advice from the agency that it was fine to go forward, and we will closely monitor it. Member for Nelson, the review you asked about that was not undertaken by the previous government—it is taking up this scheme. We will review this regularly to make sure we are keeping an eye on property prices and uptake to make sure it is achieving what we want it to, which is to get first home owners into the market at affordable rates.

Talking about current property prices—I think it is important that we put it on the record as part of this debate to show people where they are at. The Darwin median house prices at September 2014 were \$610 000; in September 2015 they were \$605 000; in 2016 they are at \$550 000. The median house prices in Katherine in September 2014 were \$357 000; in September 2015 they were \$322 000; and in September 2016 they were \$335 000. In Tennant Creek, in September 2014, they were \$271 000; in September 2015 they were \$222 000; and in September 2016 they were \$235 000. In Alice Springs, in September 2014, they were \$450 000; in September 2015 they were \$480 000; and in September 2016 they were \$423 000.

Unit prices are also very important to look at. In September 2014 the median unit price in Darwin was \$510 000; in September 2015, \$494 000; and in September 2016, \$460 000. In Alice Springs, in September 2014, \$345 000; the same for September 2015; and now they are at \$260 000. I focus on different periods for Katherine because there seems to be a bit of an anomaly in the September 2016 numbers, as I have been advised by Treasury. In June 2015, \$305 000 and in June 2016, \$272 000.

There has been a decline in the property market and people have been feeling it. We have maintained a cap of \$650 000, which will keep pressure on prices down. A significant amount of work has been done to get this program off the ground. It was incredibly pleasing to see the work that has been undertaken by Treasury to get this moving quickly. We made our policy very clear when we came to government, and Treasury has done a lot of groundwork to make sure these changes can be implemented as of 1 September to allow people to get into the housing market.

The Department of Trade, Business and Innovation has done a lot of work around the renovation grant to make sure those changes are accessible to first home owners to get them into the housing market. A huge amount of work was done on this, but it is a very important body of work. Given the current situation with the population of the Northern Territory, interstate migration and the fact we are losing too many people from the Territory, it is important we not only listen to concerns from people who want to get into the housing market but that we look at the broader Northern Territory and the potential benefits of the scheme. This is ensuring we have more people raising their family and making their future here in the Territory.

Home ownership, having your little piece of the Northern Territory, makes a very big difference in where your future will be spent. I was very pleased that the agency and this government acted swiftly upon this to deliver on our commitments, and that those benefits are truly rolling out at the moment. To think we have almost 100 Territorians, many of those being families, now in their own home is fantastic. The turnover that has created for people moving into or building another home—and we will push that movement to ensure it continues here. As a Treasurer should, I will keep a close eye on this to make sure it is delivering what we want and it is getting the results we need. I am keen to see how it is working across the different parts of the Northern Territory.

One thing that was very clear about the changes made by the former government to the established first home owner concessions was that in some parts of the Northern Territory it was a tough situation to swallow. It hurt people's ability and capacity to buy a home and get into the housing market when they did not have many options or diversity of stock. This opens up the market to more people to create their future in the Territory for the long term.

Madam Speaker, I thank all members of parliament who have contributed to this debate, and I thank them for their advocacy for their constituents, particularly first home buyers who have been keen to take up this program. I thank the staff at Treasury and the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation for all their work, and the members who had a briefing on this. We commend this bill to the House. We are very proud as a government to bring this bill to the House. We are delighted to see the benefits it is already delivering.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Ms MANISON (Treasurer)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

The Assembly suspended.

MOTION **Alcohol Reduction Measures**

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly:

- recognises that the abuse of alcohol is at the centre of the most devastating social issues in our community, including domestic violence, child neglect, violent crime and antisocial behaviour
- works together cooperatively and in partnership with the community to tackle this critical issue through policies, laws and other measures to benefit all Territorians
- calls on the Territory government to set politics aside and not discard current measures where they are having a positive impact, and to work with the parliament as a whole to develop real and lasting solutions to this entrenched social problem
- requests that the Territory government reports to this parliament every six months regarding the effectiveness of alcohol abuse reduction measures, including as a minimum with regard to the sale of alcohol, domestic violence, child neglect, violent crime and antisocial behaviour.

Over so many years, much has been said in this place of the challenges associated with the consumption of alcohol in the Northern Territory. Successive governments, one after the other, have grappled with this issue, introducing new measure after new measure. Policies have drifted this way and that, often leading to an uneasy balance struck between the competing priorities of community safety and personal liberty. Both of these are fundamentally important matters of public concern and therefore, for us in this place, they are critical matters of public policy.

In emphasising the importance of community safety, there is often a price to be paid in regard to personal liberty and, alternatively, where greater importance is given to personal liberty, this can lead to an unintended impact on community safety. These two principles are valid and important in their own right, and there is little to be gained from attempting to diminish the worth of either of them. Unfortunately this area of public policy, perhaps more than any other, is often caught in the cauldron of political rhetoric because it is so easy. It is an effective political tool. It is very difficult to argue against the principles of personal liberty when they are being promoted, and it would be foolhardy to argue against the importance of community safety.

Political rhetoric is a blunt tool, not well suited to complex matters of public policy. It can have a tendency to crowd out with noise the quiet voices of those most affected. At times, the focal point of alcohol policy has been addressing those most visible side effects, often described by the catchall term 'antisocial behaviour', by which we mean public drunkenness. We mean the unpleasant behaviour associated with public drunkenness, including the assaults on our footpaths and outside our shops, the verbal abuse at passers by, the idiotic behaviour of drunks in our entertainment precincts and so on.

Antisocial behaviour is the public face of social harm that occurs as a result of the poor judgment of individuals, brought about by excessive consumption of alcohol. It is a blight on our communities, damaging to our image interstate and abroad, and destructive to our social fabric. Far more pernicious, though, is the private harm that is perpetuated on a daily basis in the homes of too many within our communities. I am talking about those insidious issues of domestic violence and child neglect, and other forms of abuse that occur behind closed doors, those acts that are sometimes one-off, but occur too regularly to bear thinking about. It falls to us to look these issues directly in the face, to confront them head on and work together to develop appropriate responses to stem the flow.

On behalf of the opposition, I am saying that we are willing to set aside past issues of policy difference in the interests of working constructively towards a bipartisan approach to reducing the effects of alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory. I am calling on the Northern Territory Government to work with the parliament as a whole to develop real and lasting solutions to this entrenched social problem. I am calling on the Territory government to also set politics aside and not discard current measures when they are having a positive impact.

Instead it would be better to examine each of the numerous policy responses that have been trialled over time and evaluate them on their merits. Let us not get caught in the trap of rhetoric and ideology. Let us not dismiss those effective responses purely for the sake of claiming policy ownership on this issue. The problem is too big for that and it has gone on for far too long.

The statistics are irrefutable and they will not be ignored. They are so familiar to us that it is possible to become numb to them, but that would be to the detriment of all of us. According to the *Alcohol's Burden of Disease in Australia* report of 2014, 11.8% of deaths in the Northern Territory are attributable to the consumption of alcohol. That is five times higher than South Australia, which has the lowest rate of alcohol-attributable deaths, at 2.4%. The next-highest jurisdiction to the Northern Territory is Western Australia, with a rate of 4.7%. That is 2.5 times lower than the Northern Territory.

In the 12 months to 30 September this year there were 6714 assaults committed across the Territory; 3483 of those were alcohol related. Over half of total assaults were alcohol related. This is stark; it is confronting. As a young mother I am thoroughly disturbed by the prevalence and lifelong effects of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

As you know, Madam Speaker, having chaired the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder in the last parliament, this disorder has far-reaching ramifications for the Northern Territory. In your preface to the report of that committee you captured the essence of the problems associated with this condition and, in doing so, summarised the challenges of a broad range of alcohol-related harm. You wrote:

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) is doing untold harm to children in the Northern Territory; harm that will stay with them throughout their lives. Not only does this harm deny those children the life and opportunities they otherwise would have had, but it also puts an immeasurable burden on their families, carers and community. The special needs of FASD children increase the need for health services and require additional resources at school. The cognitive impairments of some FASD sufferers can cause antisocial behaviour and deny the person the capacity for independent living or employment. This can also cost the community with an increase in crime, and the challenge of justly managing individuals who do not understand the consequences of their actions.

If the extent of the impact of FASD is not horrifying enough, the sheer volume of children affected by this condition in the Northern Territory is terrible. It has been estimated that up to 1.7 live births per 1000 are potentially associated with FASD. For the Indigenous population the number could be as high as 4.7 live births out of every 1000. When you consider that for the broader non-Indigenous Australian population the prevalence of FASD could be as low as 0.02 per 1000 live births, the Territory statistics, particularly those for our Indigenous population, are simply unacceptable.

After touching on the three statistical categories I have mentioned—FASD, alcohol-related assaults and alcohol attributable deaths—it is plain to see that harm associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol permeates every aspect of our lives from birth through to death. The challenge for us is not so much in recognising the extent of the harm, but rather in determining how we should appropriately respond to curb the impacts and reverse these trends.

We are talking about a substance of which consumption is legal and has widespread social acceptance. It is able to be bought and sold in retail outlets and in restaurants, pubs and clubs across the Territory. It is consumed freely in by far the majority of homes, and more than 80% of the Territory population consumes alcohol to one degree or another in any given year. It is very much a part of our lives. This is part of the inherent difficulty in addressing the harmful effects of excessive alcohol consumption. Alcohol is freely available for purchase and how much an individual chooses to consume is, by and large, a matter for that individual. If someone is drinking in a licensed premises, the licensee has a responsibility to ensure a patron is not able to purchase alcohol once they have become intoxicated. That is about the extent of the control able to be exerted upon an individual to ensure they do not consume alcohol to excess. This restriction is only effective while a person remains within a licensed premises. As soon as they step outside and are able to access more alcohol, their decision to continue to consume is entirely a matter for them.

The measures available to policy makers are limited and they are often reliant on indirect impacts. They are designed to reduce alcohol consumption without infringing on a person's freedom to choose to consume alcohol. Such measures include the licensing and regulation of outlets able to sell alcohol to ensure the sale of alcohol is not a free for all, and that sellers of alcohol need to abide by certain guidelines and restrictions.

This is no simple matter. Alcohol retailers rely on the sale of alcohol as part of their business. There are real, legitimate, legal businesses that provide real jobs and services in our communities. They are under the same commercial pressures as any other business and rely on sufficient sales to make profits and ensure their ongoing commercial sustainability.

In the same way as any other retail business, they are able to improve their commercial success through increased sales and profitability. We want successful businesses that create jobs and prosperity. Those hotels, clubs and other venues are at the heart of our hospitality and tourism industries; they are a vital part of our economy and we want to support them.

It is no easy thing to determine an effective method of supporting these businesses on the one hand and attempting to reduce the harmful consumption of alcohol on the other. Get it wrong and we may well do more harm than good. That is why, through this motion, the Country Liberals are encouraging this parliament to work together cooperatively and in partnership with the community to tackle this critical issue. Working in partnership with the community is the key to this; we must have input from across the board. Our alcohol retailers should not be viewed as the enemy in working through this issue; they must be brought in to the discussion and have input into the range of solutions that are developed and implemented.

Our police must also be at the table for any effective discussion on reducing alcohol-related harm in our communities. Police members are often at the front line of these matters and at the pointy end of implementing many of the policy measures put in place by governments.

The Country Liberal government introduced temporary beat locations in our regional centres. These were, without a doubt, a highly effective tool for reducing alcohol-related harm in our communities. They were not popular with the police membership; however, there is far more challenging police work to be done than attending a local bottle shop to check the identification of people wanting to purchase alcohol to determine whether they are likely to consume the alcohol in a high-risk location. The measure was highly successful in reducing alcohol-related harm, and this was clearly borne out in the dramatic reduction in the number of alcohol-related assaults where temporary beat locations were in place.

In Katherine, in the second year of operation for temporary beat locations, the total number of alcohol-related assaults was 313. In the year prior to the Country Liberals taking government through to September 2013 there were a total of 533 alcohol-related assaults in Katherine. That is a 40% reduction in the number of alcohol-related assaults in Katherine. That equates to 220 fewer alcohol-related assaults in a year. By any measure that is a success.

The introduction of temporary beat locations had the effect it was designed to have. They reduced the number of people being physically harmed in our communities as a result of excessive alcohol consumption. Dr John Boffa said of the temporary beat locations last year:

... like them or not, TBLs have been very effective in reducing alcohol sales levels and alcohol-related offending.

The Northern Territory Police Association did not like temporary beat locations and its membership had concerns, but the numbers do not lie. They were clearly an effective measure in reducing alcohol-related harm. Measures like this are unlikely to have the necessary and desirable effects over the long term without the buy-in of those charged with their implementation. It is essential, therefore, that the police leadership and membership are involved in the design of measures like these to ensure they are able to function in the most effective way possible.

This new government has a mandate for the reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register. The Country Liberals will not stand in the way of that, but we urge that it be done in close consultation with the community and not at the cost of other effective measures already in place.

Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is another important policy measure that should be carefully examined on its merits before any decision is made regarding its future. It is designed to benefit those in our community who are chronic alcoholics, for whom the consumption of alcohol to great excess is a daily ritual, and the actions of whom have a regular and persistent negative impact on their own lives, the lives of those around them and the broader community. These are people who need intensive help, and they are very unlikely to seek out that help on their own. They are addicts with a dependency on alcohol. There are elements of the implementation of this initiative that require improvement, but the intent and purpose of the policy has merit.

At present the only method for referral for Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is via the *Police Administration Act*. In recent coronial findings it was discovered that the method of tracking the number of times an individual has been taken into protective custody was insufficient, and this allowed people to slip through the cracks where they may have benefited from alcohol treatment. I understand the police are currently reviewing their practices to ensure the methods for capturing protective custody episodes is appropriate and compliant with the legislation. This will also be relevant for any reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register.

The point in all of this is that the basis for any policy measure should be on what works. They should be targeted at having the agreed desired impact and an examination of the evidence should be at the heart of this. Every member of this parliament has a valuable contribution to make on the development of policies, laws and other measures to tackle this critical issue. I note that *The Preventable Disability*, the report produced by the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, contained 26 recommendations that have not yet been addressed by the Territory government. Until recently responsibility for that sat with the previous government, and fair criticism could be levelled at us on that issue. We will need to wear that. But criticism will not get us any closer to having the recommendations addressed. I urge the government to work with the parliament to find a way forward on these recommendations.

It is essential that key stakeholders, as well as the broader community, also have input into these discussions. These stakeholders are widespread. I am talking about Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations like Mission Australia, which operates our sobering-up shelters; the Australian Medical Association NT; and our night patrol operators, like Larrakia Nation and Tangentyere.

One such stakeholder is Karen Sheldon and her organisation, Saltbush Mob. I have visited Saltbush Mob and it provides a fantastic service. Saltbush Mob has been in operation since early 2015. It has introduced genuine insight and real innovation into working with clients affected by alcohol-related conditions to rebuild their self-esteem, reclaim their culture and connect them to services in a practical way by assisting to build a network of ongoing support. Karen and her team are at the coalface of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment. They have an understanding of what is and is not working. They have built experience and expertise. They have shared key recommendations in terms of improving the availability of alcohol treatment services. They are about expanding the referral mechanisms for treatment of this kind. They have recommended that consideration be given to referral for medical practitioners and self-referral.

I urge the government to take the time to meet with people like Karen Sheldon and organisations like Saltbush Mob, and to invite their participation in the development of future policies. It is really important that policies which are in place now, and those yet to be developed, are measured on a basis of evidence. There should be open and transparent availability of data to support this and enable public and parliamentary scrutiny of these measures, which will also have the effect of removing some of the potential for political rhetoric and ideology to creep back into this area of public policy.

It is, therefore, our request that the Territory government reports to this parliament every six months regarding the effectiveness of alcohol abuse reduction measures, including, as a minimum, with regard to the sale of alcohol, domestic violence, child neglect, violent crime and antisocial behaviour.

Madam Speaker, I commend this motion to the House.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Spillett for bringing this to the parliament today. It has been one of the most spoken about subjects in this House over many years, even since long before I started in parliament.

After a meeting with FARE the other day I am pleased to note that I am not alone; 20% of Australians are non-drinkers, so I feel like I belong to a minority group, but at least a reasonably-sized one. That 20% might not relate to the Northern Territory.

I say that in the sense that, while I am a non-drinker, I have lived in the Territory since I was 19. I say to people that when I first came to the Territory out of what you might call middle-class Melbourne, what I saw was an eye opener from the point of view of alcohol abuse and the effect it had on the many Aboriginal people I met.

People ask me why I do not drink. When you had 30 boys in a dormitory and half of them died under the age of 21, due to the effects of alcohol in one way or another, I think I have reason to say I am not particularly interested in drinking. Be that as it may, I do not object to people drinking, otherwise my

daughters would be very upset because they enjoy a wine or two. I understand that alcohol is a major part of our society. Where it is not abused it is a perfectly legitimate part of the way we live. Unfortunately it comes with a side that has been to the detriment of many people, not just Indigenous but also non-Indigenous people.

Looking at the Member for Spillett's motion, the last dot point says:

... requests that the Territory government reports to this parliament every six months regarding the effectiveness of alcohol abuse reduction measures, including as a minimum with regard to the sale of alcohol, domestic violence, child neglect, violent crime and antisocial behaviour.

I think we also need to look into a review of the cost of health services, police services and rehabilitation—which the abuse of alcohol causes.

I am not sure how many people had the opportunity to talk to a gentleman called Michael Thorn, who is from FARE—the national Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. Part of its job is to have a national framework for action to prevent alcohol-related family violence. He was here the other day and gave the Independents a briefing on his role. Michael Thorn was appointed as Chief Executive of FARE in 2011. Michael previously worked for the federal government as a senior official in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. He was a project director in the department's Strategy and Delivery Division. Michael is responsible for leading the foundation's effort to reduce alcohol-related harm in Australia. He sets the direction of and provides leadership to a team of dedicated staff.

Most of us know about the People's Alcohol Action Coalition, but I did not know that, in conjunction with FARE, it has produced these policy documents. If the government is willing to look at tackling alcohol and, as the Member for Spillett said, making some hard decisions, I do not think you can go much further than the nine recommendations that the People's Alcohol Action Coalition and FARE are putting forward.

I met with the People's Alcohol Action Coalition during the Masters Games this year. I appreciate the time given by Dr Boffa and the gentleman from the Criminal Lawyers Association, Russell Goldflam, and others who were there—I cannot remember all their names. I admire people like them; they are consistently banging their heads against a brick wall, making some wins and gains, but they are doing it for the benefit of the community they live in which they know, in many cases, suffers because of the abuse of alcohol. I take my hat off to them because I think they do a good job. You do not have to agree with everything they put forward, but if you look at the document they have brought forward it would be a good basis for setting off this motion before us.

I will go through a couple of the things, a few of which the member also mentioned. To start with, FARE recommends we reintroduce the Banned Drinker Register and associated measures, including identification scanning for all customers. FARE says:

Reintroduce the Banned Drinkers' Register in conjunction with scanning of photo identification cards in all licensed venues (including those licensed to sell alcohol for consumption on the premises), the Alcohol and other Drug Tribunal and the collection of comprehensive criminal justice, hospital and health data.

It is interesting because one of the issues with having a BDR was that it only picked up people at the takeaway. Technically you could park next door, go inside and drink all you like, within the guidelines of responsible serving. The point is it did not stop someone drinking. FARE also said we should continue current commitments to point of sale interventions, which the CLP brought in, including temporary beat locations, until the Banned Drinker Register is operational, and then retain them as needed based on police operational decision-making. The Police Association does not support its role of standing outside takeaway outlets; Vince Kelly's opinion was strong on that. It does work, but whether the cost should be from police budgets is something I want to ask. Should it come from the alcohol industry?

FARE also recommended the following:

Reintroduce therapeutic specialist courts for problem drinkers who commit offences.

One of the issues that was conveniently avoided when the CLP got rid of the BDR was that it was not just the BDR; there were alcohol courts set up to help people who were continually causing problems to get treatment and rehabilitation. The government scrapped the BDR and other programs at the same time to

the detriment of a program that had only been going nine months. You cannot make a good judgement, except anecdotally, on whether a program is working or not in nine months.

The People's Alcohol Action Coalition said that both incentives should be run, at least for the time being, and that we should have therapeutic specialist courts and conduct independent evaluations on the Banned Drinker Register and the specialist court upon implementation. We should report two years after the measure has been introduced. I support that. I would probably prefer three years; I would rather have a statistician tell me the best number of years to operate before you can get a clear understanding of whether a program works or not.

This was the second recommendation in the FASD report:

Introduce a minimum price for alcohol

- *Amend the Liquor Act to allow Licensing NT to set the price of alcohol.*
- *Introduce a minimum price for alcohol products equivalent to the existing minimum price of takeaway fullstrength beer, currently at approximately \$1.30 per standard drink.*

Michael Thorn explained the issues around the way we tax alcohol, and that is why we have cheap wine. Wine is dealt with in a different way to spirits and beer. Whether that is a political issue because the wine industry is a very powerful industry—at present one of the reasons you can have a lot of cheap wine is because of WET. That is to do with the taxation on wine, which is not the same as the taxation on spirits and beer. That area needs looking at. It is fair, and the packers—I will call them—have been pushing for it as well.

'Increase the capacity of treatment services' is the third recommendation:

- *Review the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Act in light of the current independent evaluation due to be completed in early 2017.*
- *Fund additional voluntary, evidence-based, culturally safe, alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services, including aftercare, across all regions in the Northern Territory.*

I am supportive of the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment program and I support a review of it. There is no point in government spending lots of money if it does not know where the money is going and if it will be effective.

I also visited Saltbush Mob at the old Berrimah prison, and I was most impressed by the way it operated. I also visited CAAAPU in Alice Springs. There are some good people there now. It had some administrative problems, but the people I saw there appear to be pretty switched on about their role. I visited there before the problems occurred, but I could see some good signs in the way it operated. People were not just locked up; they could go shopping or out bush. Even though it is mandatory, at least they were doing a range of things which would take some of the confinement out of the equation.

As I have said many times before, Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is not just about the treatment. It is also removing people from society where they have become a public nuisance. You only have to walk around Darwin—the Wet Season is the worst time—and you will see what people refer to as public nuisances. I am not putting people down; it is just a fact of life. In many cases these people are homeless and affected by alcohol. What do we do? Do we just stand around and let them lie in the gutter, on the street or on St Mary's Cathedral's veranda at night, or do we try to assist them? Do we pick them up and give them a helping hand? That may have some mandatory requirements.

I think back to the doctor at estimates who told me the things that happen when these people, for the first time in many years, have health inspections. They find out about other issues relating to these people and, for the first time, they can be treated for them. The nurse at Saltbush told me that a lot of these people have never had a decent chance to be assessed for other health problems.

I understand it costs a lot of money and that some people might think mandatory treatment is wrong. Do not forget that there is also a community mandatory treatment program, and I would love more people in communities to take responsibility for these people. Where do they come from? Is there an opportunity to try to expand this program and give some of the responsibility back to the communities, where these people can live and be looked after by their relatives?

The fourth recommendation is to reduce the number of liquor outlets:

- *Introduce a moratorium on new, transferred, and reactivated liquor licences for all licensed premises, with no exemptions.*
- *Introduce a buy-back scheme for liquor licences in the Northern Territory.*

There was a liquor licence buy-back scheme; I think they bought two licences in Alice Springs, from memory. But it was a fairly painful process and the government shied away from it.

Liquor licences are, of course, variable. They are for restaurants, takeaways, pubs, sporting facilities and sometimes just for a day program or sporting function, such as the Beer Can Regatta, which I imagine needs a liquor licence, otherwise it would be out of place. That issue needs to be looked at.

There was a moratorium on takeaway licences, and since that was lifted there have been plenty of applications for more liquor licences. Rosebery has been mentioned as a classic example. We will get onto the issue of regulation in a minute and how that has changed since the CLP got rid of the Licensing Commission.

If we are to look at a moratorium, we need to say where it is to be applied. I do not think liquor licences for restaurants are a problem, but there might be too many businesses with a liquor licences in the one place that cause problems.

Another recommendation was to prevent, diagnose and manage foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, FASD, and respond to the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. There were 26 recommendations—I was on that committee—and it is collecting dust, as far as I know. The Member for Spillett said they might have to cop some flak over it, but the CLP members did not do anything in relation to that. If they did it was pretty quiet. There were some important recommendations in the report that never happened. FASD is at risk of being one of those hidden problems that society is too scared to grapple with, and it will cost our society, from an economic point of view, millions of dollars. The social impact is of just as much concern now as it is in the future. When we look at some of the problems in prisons—have we diagnosed some of those people properly? Do they have FASD? Some of the issues of violence are being caused by FASD.

Recommendation six was to introduce a risk-based licensing scheme:

- *Introduce a risk-based licensing scheme for liquor licensing in the NT which includes: – establishing three-yearly liquor licences – differentiated fees for all licence types commensurate with the risk of alcohol-related harm – annual indexation of all licence fees.*

It is an interesting area which I do not think has been discussed very much. If you look at the document that expands on this summary—I have not looked at this before but it appears to be that a liquor licence costs you \$200, payable upon application, and the licence is provided in perpetuity; a continuing special licence, not-for-profit, is \$20, payable upon application and annual renewal required; a special licence, \$20 upon initial application; a one-off licence and transfer to liquor licence is \$2 upon application with a one-off fee.

According to this:

... licensees in the Territory pay the lowest fees in the nation for liquor licences. Every other state and territory charges higher application and annual fees. The fees payable for each licence type and other relevant details are detailed below.

And I have already stated those details.

There is also a risk—this is an interesting one:

... on-licence fees are commensurate with their likely risk of alcohol-related harm according to their trading hours, patron capacity and in some cases, their location, venue type, and compliance with licensing legislation. Off-licence fees are paid according to the wholesale value of liquor sold. Higher risk licensees pay higher fees than lower risk ones.

That is something the government should look at.

The seventh recommendation was to review trading hours:

- *Introduce 12am last drinks and 1am closing time for late night trading venues across the Northern Territory.*
- *Introduce mandatory licence conditions for all venues in the Northern Territory. This needs to include placing restrictions on alcoholic drinks such as the sale of 'shots', ready-to-drink beverages with more than five per cent alcohol, time limitations on sales, and no drink stockpiling by patrons.*
- *Introduce a takeaway sales free day each week in locations where a need is identified.*

Most of that is the Newcastle model. Some of you will remember when I tried to introduce the Newcastle model into the Mitchell Street precinct and I received a resounding 'no' from both sides of parliament, but the PAAC is advocating something very similar. It is talking about a 1 am close, but the Newcastle model implements 1.30 am for last drinks and a 3 am close. That issue ought to be looked at case by case. It has now been introduced in Kings Cross and Queensland.

People might ask why. I am not sure if people have seen these figures which surround alcohol-related assault victims. When you put non-Indigenous and Indigenous together—we are not talking about domestic violence—in 2015–16 there were 3668 alcohol-related assault victims, of whom 1211 were males and 2429 were females. I can give the breakdown of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but I do not want to do that. The breakdown I want to see is where those assaults occurred. Did they occur near licensed premises? When did they occur? From these figures we can see that alcohol-related assault numbers continue to be too high in the Northern Territory. It has gone down since 2009–10, with a rise around 2012–13, but whether one can see a trend in that reduction is probably too hard to tell from seven years of figures which go up and down.

The review of trading hours is something any government needs to look at if it is concerned about the number of alcohol-related assaults.

The Labor Party needs to look at increased community involvement and liquor licence regulation. It says here:

- *Reinstate the Northern Territory Licensing Commission and its full functions and powers as it operated under the Northern Territory Licensing Commission Act. Major decisions and determinations must be made by the Commission, with hearings conducted by a panel of members selected by the Chairperson of the Northern Territory Licensing Commission to ensure transparency.*
- *Provide \$4 million over four years to develop and fund a Northern Territory community defenders office based on the successful 'Alcohol Community Action Project' pilot.*

It is interesting when you read the details on this issue. The packers—I call them that—are not happy with what happened with the changes to the way our liquor licences are regulated. The Member for Spillett will probably remember the case of Rosebery. I went to the meetings there, but I could not object because I did not live in that area. A decision was made which went against most of the people who lived there.

It says here:

In January 2015, the Northern Territory Licensing Commission was abolished and Licensing NT established in its place. Unlike the Commission, there is no requirement for the Director-General to conduct a hearing under the liquor licensing legislation, making it extremely challenging for communities to have a say in licensing decisions. Liquor licensing decisions are currently made by one person and decision making authority can be delegated down to other licensing staff.

With the Rosebery case there was no requirement to have a public meeting. The application to have a takeaway at the Rosebery tavern, which included an application to put pokies there, was made because the person in charge, the Director-General, saw some need for public consultation in relation to that liquor licence. That was held at the Raiders rugby league ground, and people were able to have their say.

I am extremely concerned that we have a system which does not allow the community to have a say in something that is so important. There is already a liquor licence in this area. The IGA in Rosebery has a

takeaway licence. Again, the Member for Spillett probably has a better knowledge of the geography of the newer areas of Palmerston. As I understand, the Rosebery tavern applied for an internal licence. That is fine. Then, after getting approval for that, it said, 'We also want a takeaway licence and pokies'. I understand it was all approved.

I suggest the government looks at the previous system, the NT Licensing Commission's system, against the system the CLP brought in, because transparency and the ability for the community to have a say is really important when it comes to alcohol, licensing and poker machines.

The last recommendation, which is a classic and which I have mentioned before because I had it on the Notice Paper in the last Assembly, is 'Ban political donations from the alcohol industry'. There are some figures—I will read you the last bit in their expansion on that issue:

The ability to influence ministerial or government decisions raises questions of fairness, independence and quality such as whether decisions are made in the public interest or some private or commercial interest. The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Margaret Chan has stated that, 'In the view of WHO, the alcohol industry has no role in the formulation of alcohol policies, which must be protected from distortion by commercial or vested interests'.

This is not her quote now, this is just the paragraph below it:

The community is also concerned about the ability of the alcohol industry to influence policy. Over half (52 per cent) of Australians believe that the alcohol industry makes donations to influence government decision making¹²³ and almost two thirds (69 per cent) believe that political parties should not be able to receive donations from the alcohol industry.

How I back that statement! I understand Labor said it would not take any donations in this election, but we do not know who received what until after the financial year reports come in. Both parties received quite a bit of money in the previous election, and that is a great mistake. Governments have to stay away from the influence of the alcohol industry. Of course, the alcohol industry will say, 'We are an important part of the economy'. It does not say there is a cost that comes with that, which the average taxpayer has to pick up. That is, the cost of police, paramedics, nurses, doctors and hospitals looking after people for the rest of their lives due to the abuse of alcohol.

That is not to say the alcohol industry does not have a role to play. We all know a good night out at a restaurant or nightclub is part of our lifestyle. But to argue that to some extent the alcohol industry needs to be protected because it is part of the economy and gives money to the government as a sign of support to government—we are saying we are self-regulatory; we are fine. It is an area that the government should step back from and say, 'These are the rules, fellas. Stick by the rules. We do not want any money from you, thank you very much. We will make these rules independent of any possible, or even perceived, influence from the alcohol industry.'

The other part of this equation, which does not come into this motion, is the effect of advertising and sponsorship in our society. Show me how many sporting clubs do not have a licence. Show me how many of our bigger sporting facilities are not sponsored with a sign somewhere for alcohol. What is the biggest racing event in the Northern Territory? Who is it sponsored by? Huge pavilions—I get the invites to go there too. You cannot tell me that is just about racing; it is about the promotion of alcohol, and alcohol then becomes part of our society.

You see it time and time again, yet do we stand up to the alcohol industry? Do we stand up to the advertising industry? We do not. It is funny how we do with tobacco. I have not seen too many people crash their cars, file for divorce or bash up their spouse because of tobacco. I have seen it because of alcohol. Yet we step back when it comes to putting restrictions on the advertising and promotion of alcohol in our community.

Mr HIGGINS: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: This was not in the document, but we need to look at how much our sporting bodies depend on alcohol to stay viable and we need to ask whether sport, which is meant to be for a healthy society, should rely on alcohol money to keep it going?

I used to umpire football on the Tiwi Islands. I remember going to Milikapiti, which used to have a football ground. It was at a 45-degree angle so if the wind was going down the hill towards the sea it was a great place for one team to kick goals. They have fixed it up since then; it is now flat. I remember the scoreboard, which, I think, had a Swan Lager ad on the bottom. Way over in Milikapiti, Swan had to pay for the scoreboard. People might say, 'Big deal', but subtle advertising like that really concerns me.

We have other issues as well. You only have to watch TV—and you cannot get away from UBET, Ladbrokes and all the people who are advertising. They know the power of advertising to get people into betting. It is exactly the same with the alcohol industry.

A long time ago, when Mr Tuxworth was the Chief Minister, he gave me some money. When I was on Bathurst Island we used to get sick of the ads saying, 'Gotta be a man amongst the men drinking VB'. We made some ads at the Vic Hotel—I forget where the others were done—and we tried to show people the ugly side of drinking. One of the advertisements had a couple of swear words. They were not really bad swear words. Imagine how many television companies were around in 1979–80; one of them did not want to display that ad because it had swearing on yet you could go watch a movie later on in the night which had twice as much swearing in it. Even then you could see the influences—someone tried to put some ads on TV which might be seen to be anti-alcohol, and the television station was not happy about it because it knew where its revenue was coming from.

You have big players in this industry, who will fight governments that restrict their ability to sell their product. While we can talk about violence and health issues and the manner in which our governments manage alcohol, we have this overriding industry which will stand up to governments, similar to Coca Cola standing up to the government about container deposits. When you upset companies they will start to use their muscle. If you start to restrict alcohol advertising, I am sure some of those companies will not be too happy. Whether that is a better thing for the community or the industry, it is something the government should look at.

I thank the Member for Spillett for bringing this motion on. I recommend that people look at this report. It is pretty new; it only just came out. The PAAC and FARE alcohol policy is a good document for the government to look at. It is not hard to read and it is very factual. I support it being released by a group of people who are genuine. This is not some airy fairy intellectual paper from woop woop; it is from people in Alice Springs who know what they are talking about. I recommend that people read it.

We asked Michael Thorn, 'Is there any book people can read so they get an understanding of alcohol and how it operates in the world?' He said, 'Read *Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity*'. It is a research and public policy document. It is the second edition. It deals with the issues of alcohol around the world. It deals with Australia and other places, because this is not an issue just in Australia. I asked the Parliamentary Library for a copy of the book and I have been going through parts of it. It is a very informative book.

We have to be informed if we are to make good decisions, but we have to use the advice of people who are knowledgeable and who know about the industry and the issues in the Northern Territory. I could not go any further than to recommend this document—the PAAC and FARE alcohol policy—as the groundwork for any new policies the Northern Territory Government might introduce in relation to alcohol in the Territory.

Ms FYLES (Health): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Spillett for bringing this important issue into the House. I also thank the Member for Nelson for his contribution to the debate so far. I have seen the documents he referred to and the group has met with my office.

Our government has a well-developed policy and plan to reduce the devastating impacts of alcohol on our community. We will have an evidence-based approach. I am pleased to advise honourable members that our plans go beyond those suggested by the Member for Spillett today.

The Northern Territory has sent a very clear message that the measures in place under the former government did not work, and we must urgently and sensibly address the problem of alcohol abuse in our community. Over the last four years we saw a mismatch of policy and we did not have an evidenced approach, something which is crucial. The CLP measures were heavy handed and poorly integrated, often working against each other, rendering them ineffective and a great cost to deliver.

During the election campaign community members told us that the current measures were not enough and they wanted the Banned Drinker Register brought back. I acknowledge the support offered by the opposition today, which the Leader of the Opposition has mentioned previously, to bring back the Banned Drinker Register.

The Member for Spillett raised some important issues and aspects in regard to tackling this crippling problem, but our policy goes further to address this complex issue. As the House would have heard during my Address in Reply to the Administrator in the October sittings, our policy is health focused, with an evidence-based approach to alcohol management and harm reduction to improve community and family safety.

Our new measures are not about politics or discarding current measures; they are about evidence and impact. We will take an evidence-based approach. We are listening to the experts. The Department of Health is leading the alcohol policy development, spearheaded by the reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register by September 2017. This will help limit the supply of alcohol to problem drinkers. I have already commenced the consultation and I have started working with the Departments of Health and Justice to implement the Banned Drinker Register. The BDR comes as a package; there are a number of measures. We have already begun consultation with the community, the Australian Hotels Association and retailers on how we reintroduce the BDR and implement it in the community.

The Department of the Attorney-General and Justice is leading the implementation of the BDR system infrastructure with licensed takeaway premises. This includes the development of an underlying Banned Drinker Register database—configuring, installing, point of sale, point of entry, equipment, telecommunications, infrastructure and software. It was a real shame the previous government simply removed it. One day the equipment was simply removed from those retailers. It is a huge body of work to reintroduce that, and legislation will come before this Assembly so we can do that.

Licensing NT will consult broadly, including with the AHA and affected licence holders, to determine the best infrastructure to ensure minimal impact on their business and customers. We are conscious that we are asking businesses to roll out a point of sale supply alcohol measure.

Our decision to reintroduce the Banned Drinker Register is consistent with our intention to adopt an evidence-based approach to dealing with alcohol and its many challenges. The BDR was introduced by the Labor government in 2011 and was beginning to produce positive results as a strong supply reduction measure, not least of which being that more than 2500 problem drinkers lost the right to purchase takeaway alcohol. Its effectiveness can be gauged by its support from key stakeholders, including the Police Association NT and peak bodies such as the People's Alcohol Action Coalition.

I cannot remember the exact quote, but police indicated it was one of the best tools they had to tackle alcohol problems. Even when you consult with those involved, such as the AHA, Clubs NT and retailers, they welcome the BDR as a point of sale intervention that helps tackle this issue of alcohol supply in our community.

The CLP's politically driven decision to remove the BDR in 2012 led to an escalation in problem drinking, and, without adequate policy in place, problem drinking and antisocial behaviour escalated immediately. This was seen on the streets across the Northern Territory. We had huge issues with antisocial behaviour, which we have continued to grapple with since the BDR was removed.

We have made it clear, on this side of the House, that we will not remove any measures until our measures are in place. We will not allow the policy vacuum to happen, which is what we saw under the CLP government. We need to make sure policies are in place and working before we remove other policies.

Reintroducing the Banned Drinker Register is not all we are doing; it will be supported by a therapeutic court and access to appropriate treatment services. There will be multiple entry or trigger points to the Banned Drinker Register to address the multitude of issues caused by alcohol abuse, an important point. We are talking about taking a sensible and measured approach to reintroducing the BDR. We are working as efficiently as possible, but we are also aligning it and planning it with evidence-based approaches, and we have already made progress.

In October I was pleased to inform the House that I approved the new takeaway licensing guidelines for use by the Director-General. I was very proud to sign that guideline. Section 125A of the *Liquor Act* provides that with the minister's approval the Director-General of Licensing may issue guidelines in relation to the operation and administration of the act. The new guidelines restrict the issuing of takeaway alcohol licences except under specific circumstances. An application for a takeaway licence will be considered only if it meets one of the following criteria: for a premises to be located in a new residential/commercial land development in a greenfield site—we need to think about places like Weddell—as in, a new site, not just a new development; if it is associated with a new hotel for in-house guests—if a new hotel is built in Alice Springs, Darwin or any of our regional centres, we would provide for people to have takeaway alcohol in

their rooms on-site—and for bespoke Territory businesses, which you are familiar with, Madam Speaker, such as mango beer. As someone who does not like mangoes or beer, that is not something I would enjoy.

We were very proud to sign that so takeaway licences were capped and so we can tackle this issue. Our reforms bring back balance to the takeaway licence application process and are a positive step in reducing the harm of alcohol in our community.

I noted the Member for Nelson's concerns about the licensing process. The CLP changed the process from a tribunal, which allowed for community consultation to the Director-General process. Member for Nelson, I will update the House further, but that is something I, too, hold concerns about. The community should be involved in the process of allowing for licences.

Somebody said to me, 'If it is something simple like letting a bottle shop have an extra half hour or hour, that is not a big deal and it can go straight through'. I said, 'Stop. That is what we are talking about.' For someone who lives near a bottle shop, an extra half hour or hour is a big difference. We need to ensure the community is included all the way on this journey, especially within the licensing process. The new guidelines we have introduced will ensure we do not see a continued influx of new licensed premises, which we have seen in recent years.

Over the coming months, Alcohol Mandatory Treatment will be wound back. The evidence of the success of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is shaky at best. It is a huge cost of \$24m a year operation, plus capital costs on top of that. We will still have treatment options; they will not be mandatory. We will have clear pathways where people can be referred by health practitioners and professionals to treatment options. I think one of the biggest faults of Alcohol Mandatory Treatment is the lack of pathways. There was a recent amendment to allow health practitioners, in 2015—to start with, police were the only people who could provide the pathway to AMT and then there was the health practitioner amendment, but we have still not seen the pathway being taken up.

Mr Wood: Will you wait for the Menzies review?

Ms FYLES: A review is due to be completed by the end of January 2017. We have listened; we do not believe mandatory treatment is the way forward. It is a huge cost to our community. We will have other pathway opportunities.

For our alcohol harm reduction strategy to succeed it will not rely only on the reintroduction of the Banned Drinker Register. We are reviewing and considering a range of evidence-based, alcohol health-focused strategies. We are developing an integrated service system with pathways to specialist assessment and detoxification services, comprehensive healthcare, reintegration and transition back in to the community, with secure and supportive accommodation options.

People talk about the post-treatment supported pathways. That is very important and this government will focus on that. For people coming out of treatment, often not within their home community, we need to help transition them back to community. That is an important part of its success.

There has been much talk about the temporary beat locations—TBLs, POSIs, it depended on what day of the week it was. Temporary beat locations were introduced by the previous Labor government to work in association with the Banned Drinker Register. They will stay in place, but it will be decided by police where and when they are used. A politician in Darwin will not be directing where they go. That will be decided by operational police out on the beat. They will be used complementary to the Banned Drinker Register, perhaps around certain events—for example, when the show is in town—when police feel that the community would benefit from having a temporary beat location. That will assist police in concentrating on law enforcement and not restricting the sale of alcohol.

As a government we do not have all the answers on the deep-rooted problem of alcohol, and that is why our approach will continue to be consultative and collaborative. As Minister for Health I will continue my extensive consultation schedule, meeting with key stakeholders to discuss our plans on how we can work together. We recognise that it is not just an issue that impacts one sector of our community. It is not a responsibility that only lies with government; it is a whole-of-government issue, a whole-of-community issue. It impacts our entire community.

I have already received correspondence and met with many professionals and community members with expertise in this field, and I will always take on board their advice. We will continue to work together with

key stakeholders to assist us in the development of a broad range of strategies to succeed in minimising alcohol-related harm.

As we have spoken about in this House many times, we all know the devastating effects of alcohol abuse in our communities, especially those exposed in utero and diagnosed with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Our plans will address problem drinkers and the devastating lifelong impacts on these children. We are making a strong start by creating a whole-of-government response to address the issue arising from FASD. We will build on the work that was done by the Select Committee on Action to Prevent Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Something you know intimately, Madam Speaker. It was ignored by the CLP government for four years, even though there were many calls to take on board the committee's advice. We will lead the development of a holistic framework to address prevention, diagnosis, support services and community education.

FASD encompasses the individual from infancy, and their entire community. It needs to be approached with a cohesive support network to provide the necessary integrated care and support to give those people the best chance at life. I am pleased to inform the House that important work is already being carried out in this area. In Central Australia the FASD diagnostic and treatment group is a joint initiative between the Alice Springs Hospital and the Office of Disability. This group is made up of members from government and non-government agencies, and it has commenced the pilot assessment tools, including the *Australian Guide to the diagnosis of FASD*.

In Alice Springs there are eight medical and allied health professional staff who are trained in FASD diagnosis. The Department of Health will continue to take the lead in this area, including the planning of a forum that will be an opportunity for leaders in this field to come together. That FASD tool will help with diagnosis as well as in the education space. It will hopefully help us address the issues of the people diagnosed with FASD.

Our alcohol policy will involve the introduction of legislation to support the Banned Drinker Register. I will take it upon myself to brief all members of the House as that legislation evolves. It is complex legislation. The proposed new parliamentary committees will provide an opportunity for careful consideration in detail of the new legislation by members. That is an opportunity for everybody here in this House if that goes ahead.

With respect to reporting, I can assure the Member for Spillett the data that will measure the effectiveness of our alcohol reduction measures is already readily available through various government departments. After listening to her speech today, I know she has researched some of those sites.

The Department of Health provides data on alcohol-attributed hospital admissions and alcohol-related emergency department presentations in the Northern Territory. The comprehensive report is carefully collated by the Health Gains Planning section of the Department of Health. It includes presentations for which alcohol is 100% attributable to the admission, as well as those for which alcohol is 40% attributable to the admission. This data is provided for each of the Territory's hospitals' emergency departments. The data also includes information on the type of injury or illness that is the reason for admission. It also includes data on assault and antisocial behaviour.

On the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation's website there is information readily available on wholesale alcohol supply statistics. It is used to assist monitoring of alcohol-related harm and antisocial behaviour. The information also provides a framework for alcohol management measures. This information is presented for the Territory as a whole and for each of the urban centres, including Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs and Nhulunbuy.

For information on crime statistics, including domestic violence-related and alcohol-related assaults, the Police, Fire and Emergency Services' website provides that information. It is readily available across the Territory. Information is also available on the effectiveness of child protection in the *Report on Government Services*, which is available on the Australian Government Productivity Commission's website.

The government is reducing the devastating impact of alcohol. We are taking action and will continue to do so. We will implement evidence-based measures to reduce the harm of alcohol on the social fabric and the health of our communities. I look forward to continuing to provide further updates to the House as we progress with this.

I have consulted with health professionals—the Member for Spillett touched upon the hard-working people within our hospitality industry. I have met key stakeholders as well as key health professionals.

We are doing a lot in this space, but the government will not support the motion. We have been busy in this space and will continue to be. As I said, we will continue to update the House.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I support this motion. To give people a bit of history, as people on the other side of the House would know, when I was elected to parliament and the government got rid of the Banned Drinker Register I was outspoken publicly. I am not too sure if I made reference to it specifically in this parliament, but I spoke about it publically and fully supported the FASD committee. In Question Time I asked about the strategic Indigenous reserves, and people opposite, especially those who were not in parliament at the time—I am glad the Member for Nelson pointed out that I supported the strategic Indigenous reserves not only in this House, but in the party room and in the media.

I need to ensure that some of that history is correctly documented and not altered by people who were not present at the time. If people look at the history of this parliament they will see there was an alcohol committee in the 1980s and 1990s. I cannot find the reason it was gotten rid of, but it was a committee of parliament that involved bipartisan support and which continually looked at alcohol strategies and policies of this parliament. The purpose of bringing this motion in is to say, 'Let's put all these party politics arguments aside; there is a problem so let's address it.'

When I first moved to the Daly in the late 1990s—people would remember ATSIC. The Member for Nelson would know where the chook farm used to be at the Five Mile; he built it. That is still referred to today as the drying-out centre and it was funded by ATSIC. I had a lot of involvement with that because the people there were whole families. The purpose of it was to try to educate people with alcohol problems on how to address those problems as a family unit.

One of the issues was that in the Daly, like anywhere else, it is hot and they wanted to go swimming. If they went swimming down at the Daly River crossing, as well as there being crocodiles, there were other people there who would distract them and get them up to the Daly River pub. We offered up the farm as a place for those people to come, which was away from all that. There was a pool and some barbecues, and they spent some time there. It was a bit of a break away from the Five Mile drying-out centre, and it made them feel a bit more normal, you might say, and they knew they would not be harassed by fellow residents of the area.

I learned very early that with the flooding—not so much flooding, but the river and the rain—the crossing would go under early. There were 3000 or 4000 people living west of the Daly. I was west of the Daly, and I was the ferryman. For 16 years people would come to our place and get a lift across the river. After a while they knew I would do the boat ride at 2 pm. If they were 10 minutes late, they missed out. They always got there at 2 pm, but there was one big condition, which was that I never carried any alcohol across that river. I have since learned that people have various ways of hiding alcohol. I did not inspect their bags, but they could not carry on board cartons of beer et cetera, but if they had it with their groceries there was not much I could do.

One day I took my quad bike to the front gate and it was half flooded. They would go across the river and come back, and there was water across the road. When I got to it, here was this flat bottomed boat that some people had been across on, and I do not know how many cartons of beer they had in that boat, but I reckon it was about 30 or 40. You could not get into the boat. How they actually got across the river, I have no idea.

I subsequently found out they were towing a trailer. They are ingenious when it comes to moving grog around the Northern Territory. They towed a trailer, which was an axle and some wheels that had some 44s and a big grate. Every time they came to a creek or a crossing they backed that into the water, drove the troopie onto it, and a few fellas got out the front and swam across. On this occasion, with this boatload of grog, they hooked up the trailer and got to Saddle Rail. They put the grog and the troopie on the trailer. A few of them were in the water swimming, trying to pull it across, and it tipped over. As far as I know they got all the grog, but the car stayed there.

One of the disappointments was they had a club in the community and you could only get so many cans in that community if you had done your day's work. It is a dry community at Naiyu, even though it is not Aboriginal land; it is freehold land, but they choose to do that.

At that time the Daly River pub came up for sale, and ATSIC loaned them the money, which I thought was ironic. ATSIC was funding the drying-out centre and provided the money to buy the pub. They then closed the club down, so the pub became the local drinking place.

Later in the time I was there the Banned Drinker Register was introduced. The interesting thing is that we had a liquor licence at the Daly and there were conditions around the licence. Those conditions were that if you came and had a meal you could have drinks. The only way you could get any takeaway alcohol from us was if you were a resident staying at the caravan park. Many of the locals never worked that out, so they never got to buy any takeaway.

I inquired about the Banned Drinker Register and asked what to do in this instance. They had a problem because the communications there were via radio telephone, which is basically a microwave link. The telephone wires that went from there into the bistro ran up the mango tree and then went across through the air into the building, so the communications were not all that great. In the end we were told by the decision-makers that giving residents a limited amount of alcohol was not really takeaway, which I thought was most unusual.

As I said before, I was outspoken when I got into government about the Banned Drinker Register. In some ways there were some issues with it in the fact that people may have been a bit upset—and I am not being critical of it; do not get me wrong—that they continually had to produce their licence. During the time I had to get a couple of new licences because by the time I realised I had left my licence at the grog shop when we came into town, we would already be well past Adelaide River or wherever. I knew that was a potential problem. Those are the type of things that can be tweaked. I said, 'Do not cut off your nose to spite your face. There is a problem and you need to address it.'

I heard the Member for Nelson say he does not drink, and there are some others here who do not drink. I drink, but after I was elected I decided that I would not drink if I was doing anything official. I thought it was not appropriate. I have a rule at the moment, which my wife enforces, that I am not allowed to drink when I am out. I have to drink at home. I have my own fridge now, so I have plenty. She enjoys that because she likes a glass of champagne. It means, if I am not being driven, I have to drive. That is a decision I made which is a personal choice.

We have a visit from a man from FARE the other day and I was talking to him about—I will talk about Josh. I am sure he will not mind me talking about this. Josh suffers from epilepsy. I said to the guy from FARE, 'One of the problems I have with the medical profession around the effects of alcohol is that sometimes I would ask the doctors about the cause of seizures and if there is any link to alcohol, because I knew that if he had a couple of drinks it increased the opportunity for an epileptic seizure. The doctors would say there was no connection.' I asked the President of the Epilepsy Association what he knew about it. He said, 'All I can tell you, Gary, is that if I have two cans of VB a night I am fine'. If he has three he is guaranteed to have a seizure.

Alcohol may not be linked directly to seizures, but does it have an effect on the medication? I suspect that it does. People with epilepsy take multiple medications, and I think there are many connections like that. As people know, I am diabetic. I take insulin, which is another reason you have to watch how much you drink; you can have a few problems. It definitely has an effect, but I think many people know about it.

When the FASD committee was established I was very keen to be on it. In this parliament we have five of the six members who were on that committee. The Member for Barkly got involved when we went to the Barkly, so I know he was keen. I found it interesting. One thing that always stuck in my mind was a doctor who came to see us in Katherine and said, 'There is no one over 45 to 50 who has FASD'. The question, of course, is did they die?

Looking back at what happened 45 years prior to that—there were two things he said that stuck in my mind. We had land rights and those types of issues come along; it was a freeing-up of rights for Indigenous people. I agree that they should have those rights, but it gave them a lot more access to alcohol.

For those who were around in the early 1970s—I know the Members for Barkly and Nelson would have been, but I do not know how old everyone else here is. I think the first bottle of wine that I ever saw was called Ben Ean Moselle. We used to call it benzene. You also had Porphyry Pearl and Passion Pop. Alcohol started to change; you had flagons and that sort of stuff. It became more available. After they banned the flagons they came out with cask wine. They used to have a plastic esky that you could get frozen ice at the bottom of and then stick the bag out of the cardboard cask into it and carry it around like a professional drinker.

That meant alcohol was more available to everyone. That is what this doctor was pointing out—when it first started. A lot of facts have been mentioned by members here, and everyone in this parliament, and the last, would be aware of that report. There are a lot of facts and figures, but the big question relates to a lot

of other things. Why does Joshua have epilepsy? Did his mother drink too much when she was pregnant? I am talking about in the 1970s and 1980s, but what is the link? I think there is still a hell of a lot more work that can be done in the area which points at the problems with alcohol.

Looking at the options that members of this House continually argue about—the Banned Drinker Register. I constantly hear it referred to as the banned drinkers' register, but there is no S on the drinker. That is one option, but there is a stack of other options. The Banned Drinker Register, as the Member for Nelson said, only picks up people who have bought takeaway alcohol; it does not pick up people who drink in a restaurant. One of the options around the Banned Drinker Register is to extend it to cover people in restaurants or bars, or to look at when the intervention occurred and there was a limit to the amount of alcohol people could buy before their names were put on a register. What happened to the register, I do not know.

If someone went to dinner at night time and might drink \$50 worth of alcohol—you could introduce a limit of \$50. There is also the option that if you buy more than \$50 or \$100 worth of alcohol—and I am not specifying any amount—you have to produce your licence. That is one option. You still have the ability for places like Tennant Creek—which I believe has a zero-dollar amount, am I right? Katherine has changed opening times and implemented other restrictions. You still allow people who have these alcohol agreements in place—where that would apply. There is a lot you can do with the Banned Drinker Register.

It is the same with alcohol mandatory rehabilitation. Sure, there might be problems with it—I am not saying there is or not—but many of those things can be tweaked. Some of the things around the alcohol court can be monitored a bit more closely and changed. But these are issues that need a lot more discussion in this place.

The issue of TBLs is the same. Is it the police who should be doing that or should you have other ancillary police doing it? I am not suggesting anything; I am just saying they are the options.

Changing the floor price, which the Member for Nelson raised, is an issue that has not been implemented here. One of the issues with the floor price is that you are giving money to the retailers or wholesalers and it is not coming back to government. One of the pluses is the volumetric tax, which we had here. People can remember the low alcohol level of 3.3%—I think that was Carlton Light—which was the level picked by parliament to alter their tax. We lost the High Court challenge which the cigarette companies brought forward initially, and then the alcohol companies said we could not introduce these taxes. That became a federal matter, and then it became GST.

GST is an issue I spoke about yesterday. It was pointed out by the Treasurer that the government one-upped us by meeting with the Prime Minister. I presented her today with a picture of me with the Prime Minister in his office in Canberra, but we were not having a drink. I did not know where I would manage to fit that in, but I did it.

Volumetric tax is a federal issue; people can push the federal government. A lot of the people who are involved have been pushing—and it is a way by which a tax can come back for us to fund rehabilitation and other things. The parliament can look at what we do with advertising and sponsorship. Is there anything we can do in that area? There is a stack of areas we can look at.

Member for Nelson, the lockouts in Sydney and Newcastle—did you speak on that? When I was in Sydney I quickly looked at them, and, at the time, I sent him a picture of a big, flashing notice board ...

Ms MANISON: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr HIGGINS: I sent the Member for Nelson a photograph of that notice board. There is a lot of advertising telling people about the lockouts.

Look at all the problems caused by alcohol. We have raised these issues already—domestic violence, which everyone here is aware of, and antisocial behaviour, which we see outside. A lot of people automatically think antisocial behaviour is just to do with Indigenous people, but it is not.

I will give you an example. Rhonda and I came into town one day from the Daly, and it was getting under my skin that people were pointing the finger at Indigenous people all the time. We were at a restaurant

opposite a hotel in town—I forget the name—and when we were parking our car there was a carload of young European people with an esky in the back of the car, drinking. They were going out on the town that night. I rang the police and said, ‘This is the situation. Will you do something about it?’ They said, ‘Are they Indigenous?’ I said, ‘No’. They said, ‘They’ll be right; they will go to the club’, which I thought was pretty bad. We need to realise that antisocial behaviour and domestic violence are not issues that just relate to the Indigenous people of the Territory; they relate to everyone. European people just do it behind closed doors.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder really gets a lot of coverage in the problem. That will cost us millions over the years. We need to address that at the source. It is not good enough to say, ‘How do we rehabilitate these people?’ That is an issue, but we have to address it at the source.

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder gets a lot of coverage. That will cost us millions over the years. We need to address that at the source. It is not good enough to say, ‘How do we rehabilitate these people?’ That is an issue, but we have to address it at the source.

I always find it interesting that no matter what you do as a drink-driver we never stop you from being able to buy grog. If you are pulled up for drink-driving you are not banned from buying grog as part of your punishment. We will stop you from driving, dropping your family places and going to work, but we will still let you buy grog. Eventually you will be locked up, but initially we do not.

Earlier I spoke about Indigenous communities and the smuggling of grog across the river in boats. Something else I found was that in Wadeye people were selling small bottles of spirits for nearly \$500. The question was asked why it was not in proper bottles and how it was getting into the community. The police worked it out after a while. They pulled a car up which had a stack of jerry cans in it. One was brand new. They said, ‘What’s in that new jerry can?’ They opened it and found it was full of scotch. They get quite ingenious in how they move alcohol around. These people are dependent on alcohol and they will go to extremes to get it, the same as drug users who will go to no end to satisfy their need.

The other problem we have spoken about is Larrakia Nation and its problems returning people to country. That is a critical issue. To address the problem we have to be able to return these people to country, but if they are coming here to drink and spend all their money, what are the alcohol companies contributing to that? We should look at that.

I support the motion. It is an opportune time to solve this problem, and we wanted to remove any arguments on which policy is better. I was disappointed in the response from the other side. There was some criticism about how bad the last government was in this area, and that was uncalled for in this motion.

If we want to go forward in addressing alcohol it will take cooperation to the extent that people need to move on and move forward, not look backwards. You have two members here from the previous government who have admitted there were problems. Let us move on. Let us fix the problem. Do not keep raising issues of the past. Learn from the past. Let’s move forward and take this opportunity.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank everyone who contributed to the debate this afternoon on this important motion from the opposition.

I am astonished, dumbfounded and disappointed at the lack of government participation in this motion. I did not see that coming, and it shows a total disregard by this government for finding a genuine, bipartisan, whole-of-parliament, whole-of-community solution to the scourge of alcohol in our community.

The fact we only saw the Minister for Health make a contribution from the government benches sends a bad message not only to other members in the parliament, but to the community about how the lines are drawn. They are fixed in the sand and we will not be seeing an approach to alcohol policy that is driven by the community. That is a great shame. This afternoon we have missed an opportunity to work together as a parliament and as the Northern Territory community to find positive and meaningful solutions to something that is far reaching and devastating to the community.

I think Territorians would have expected the Chief Minister to contribute to this debate, not only as the leader of our Territory, but as our Police minister, the child protection minister, the Minister for Territory Families, and the Housing minister—so many questions are now left wanting for an answer because of the lack of contribution. I do not know why that is or what this government is afraid of. Why would they not have extensive participation in this motion by the parliament?

We have not heard anything from the backbench regarding this, yet they all represent in excess of 5000 Territorians, all of whom have some interaction with alcohol or a story to tell, and a contribution to make to the solution. It is extraordinary that the Minister for Health took the reins on this and led the team in a very party political manner. I ask the government again, what are you afraid of by stepping forward and working in this way?

I want to take the opportunity to express an approach by FARE, the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education. We were fortunate enough to meet with FARE the other day. I think its approach was captured in the essence of our motion. The government could have participated today, but it has chosen not to. I quote from the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education:

The Northern Territory needs a comprehensive approach to reducing alcohol-related harm that focuses on targeting alcohol's availability, supporting community initiatives, and supporting those who are affected by alcohol problems. Governments cannot on the one hand say they are concerned about alcohol consumption levels while continuing to approve liquor licences and relax regulation. This plan must be embraced by all sides of politics to ensure that it lasts beyond political cycles.

I think what the government has done today by not supporting this motion flies in the face of what FARE thinks needs to be achieved and how the opposition feels about working constructively towards a bipartisan approach to reducing the effects of alcohol abuse in the Northern Territory.

In essence, this motion called on the Territory government to work with the parliament as whole to develop lasting solutions to these entrenched social problems. I am not sure why you would not support that.

The motion called for a report by the government every six months to report to the parliament on alcohol measures, the sale of alcohol, domestic violence, child neglect, violent crime and antisocial behaviour so we can all work together to do our best to rid our community of these issues and monitor progress of successful programs, have consideration of the ones that are not as successful and be agile and adjust our responses as an entire community.

The language of the Health minister was disappointing in that we saw a deep partisan approach. There was talk of 'ours' and 'yours', precisely what this motion was engineered and designed to eliminate. We wanted to rid the parliament of the battle lines that are so traditionally drawn.

Mr Paech: Pity they did not do that before.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I pick up on the interjection. We have a new member jeering across the Chamber after barely three months in this place. He is navel gazing and reflecting back and not taking this position seriously ...

Mr Paech: On your four years.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ... that we must, as leaders in our community, members of parliament, government members, opposition and crossbenchers, take our role in this debate extremely seriously.

We hope this government takes an evidence-based approach. We will watch, apparently from the sidelines, and we hope this evidence-based approach results in good things for the Northern Territory. We hope 'your'—to use that divisive language—policies achieve the outcomes the Northern Territory needs. While we wanted the parliament to have ownership and contribution to this debate, it has been made very clear today that will not be happening.

It is interesting, from a government that took matters to Territorians and went to this election saying, 'Trust us, we will be a government that is trustworthy and operates with integrity. We will consult', that once again we have lost an enormous opportunity to consult with the community.

I am astonished at the decision today. Are you so arrogant already, in the three short months you have been in government, that you cannot work with this parliament? The silence is deafening. It is clear you do not want to work with retailers, stakeholders or organisations that invest their time, money and livelihood in finding solutions. You do not want to involve other members of parliament or the broader Northern Territory community.

I thank the Member for Nelson for his contribution. This is something he speaks passionately about and he has been advocating on this for as long as I have been involved. That is a scratch on the surface of how long he has been involved in representing Territorians in the parliament.

I also thank my colleague, Gary Higgins. We both support this motion. Gary has a long history in the area of tackling alcohol abuse and he is connected and close to it, and passionate about it.

I wish the government the best of luck with its policies, which reign supreme, and I hope it is able to find a solution, but it is disappointing that we do not have an agreement to move forward and do something different, working collegiately as a parliament to achieve outcomes for Territorians.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes 6

Mrs Finocchiaro
Mr Guyula
Mr Higgins
Mrs Lambley
Mr Mills
Mr Wood

Noes 16

Ms Ah Kit
Mr Collins
Mr Costa
Ms Fyles
Mr Gunner
Mr Kirby
Ms Lawler
Mr McCarthy
Mr McConnell
Ms Manison
Ms Moss
Mr Paech
Mr Sievers
Ms Uibo
Mr Vowles
Ms Wakefield

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION

Tackling the Housing Deficit in Remote Communities

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that the this Assembly calls on the Territory government to detail its implementation plan for Tackling the Housing Deficit in Remote Communities, including:

- how shires, regional authorities and housing organisations will make decisions about what to build, where to build, how to build, and who will build
- how many new houses will be constructed, when they will be constructed and where they will be constructed next year and over the next 10 years
- how many new bedrooms will be constructed, when they will be constructed and where they will be constructed next year and over the next 10 years
- how many local remote employees will be eligible for government employee housing, what departments they work for and in what communities they reside
- how many new houses will be constructed for local government employees next year and over the next 10 years
- how tenancy management will be devolved to local communities.

This is an important motion. This is about the Labor Party's flagship election policy. This is about its \$1.1bn commitment to Tackling the Housing Deficit in Remote Communities. It is an important commitment and there is a great deal of expectation about this policy in the bush. They have heard the government's promises and they are waiting.

Promises are the easy part; even spending commitments are not a great challenge. The challenge comes when the rubber of policies like this start to hit the road. How much of this good intent starts to get obscured with poor implementation? Essentially, that is the purpose of this motion, to bring to the fore the various aspects of this policy and test how it will be implemented and whether that is likely to meet the expectations of people on the ground.

We have asked numerous questions and, so far, we have only been given motherhood statements and stories, which are all well and good, sometimes informative, occasionally interesting, but they serve little purpose when it comes to putting a roof over someone's head.

The government has now been in place for 88 days, three months. Surely by now the government will have some idea how this policy will be rolled out and it will be able to provide details today.

The Chief Minister's words yesterday were:

We should never again go through the housing crunch we had under the last Labor government when we did not get land release quite right.

Territorians paid the price for that policy blunder and suffered through unsustainable housing prices and astronomical rents. It is really important for this government to get this right; it is important for the people on the ground, living in remote communities—the people who are waiting and watching. This is also important because of how this enormous commitment will be funded; that is, through taking money from the infrastructure budget, which might have been spent on a range of other economic infrastructure, and redirecting it to support this program. I am not arguing with the merits of that. I am scrutinising the potential effects of this. One hundred million dollars is a lot of money to be redirected. Time will tell what businesses will be directly affected by that.

There are some complex elements to this policy, which have wide-ranging effects on how remote housing construction will be delivered and who will be responsible for what. There will be impacts on local government organisations and it is important that the details are provided. The government has said that shires, regional authorities and housing organisations will make decisions about what to build, where to build and how to build. As an election policy this sounds marvellous. It seems to tick all the boxes, but what does it mean?

Will shires and regional authorities be charged with managing that budget? How will the funds be allocated, by region or by need? How will it work? Have shires been consulted about their role in this? What will be required of them? What does it mean that they will decide what to build? Are we talking about house design, house numbers or construction method? Will shires get to choose from a suite of designs? How will they be involved in this process? When it comes to who will build, how exactly will shires be responsible for that? Do they know what will be expected of them? What are we talking about here? Will shires be running the procurement process? How does this align with government procurement policies? Shires will decide where to build; how has this been thought through? Will shires be resourced appropriately with this added responsibility? What is the plan?

Government employee housing is a great sounding promise at \$20m. This is to support local recruits living in communities where they do not have access to the same housing entitlements as outside recruits. The government has indicated that the housing standards will be the same as for current government employee housing. As far as I am aware, the average price for constructing a government employee house is in excess of \$700 000. I reckon you will not build many more than about 25 houses a year, at best.

How many local recruits will be eligible for these new entitlements? More than 500? More than 1000? What is the number? Whatever the number, at 25 a year we will be there for many years to come. How will this discrepancy in entitlements be managed over time? Which workers will be housed first? Local police, health workers or assistant teachers? When will you start providing details about who wins and who loses? When it comes to new bedrooms, surely you would have those numbers by now. The policy is supposed to start rolling out next year. These details must be known.

I really hope the government is able to flesh out the plan for delivering this very important policy. I hope the minister will be able to put some meat on the bones of these impressive promises, and I look forward to hearing about them today.

This is an important motion, and those questions are important not only to me and my community, but to everyone in this House. I expect to hear a lot of these questions being asked from the members opposite in the bush seats that will be affected by this policy.

Mr McCARTHY (Housing and Community Development): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, just to clear the record for the Leader of the Opposition, the CLP changed the name of the councils to regional government councils, which should be reflected in debates in this House.

I want to address the Leader of the Opposition's motion regarding Tackling the Housing Deficit in Remote Communities. During the Legislative Assembly sittings on 27 October 2016 the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Gary Higgins MLA, moved that on the next business day

... the Territory government to detail its implementation plan for Tackling the Housing Deficit in Remote Communities, including:

- how shires, regional authorities and housing organisations will make decisions about what to build, where to build, how to build, and who will build*
- how many new houses will be constructed, when they will be constructed and where they will be constructed next year and over the next 10 years*
- how many new bedrooms will be constructed, when they will be constructed and where they will be constructed next year and over the next 10 years*
- how many local remote employees will be eligible for government employee housing, what departments they work for and in what communities they reside*
- how many new houses will be constructed for local government employees next year and over the next 10 years*
- how tenancy management will be devolved to local communities.*

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for this motion. Everyone in this House knows the importance of remote housing in the Territory. The Michael Gunner Labor government is strongly committed to working with the community, working in partnership, listening, engaging and ensuring that together we produce outcomes. This is the only way we will ensure that people have access to adequate and safe housing in the bush. It is the only way to move forward and achieve outcomes.

I will read from the remote engagement strategy that was launched by the previous government. The document was well written by the former Local Government and Community Services department. It is a good, practical document as it sets out clear pathways on the most effective way to engage in the remote space. There are some good words in it that are worth reading. I table a copy of the document, which was produced in the previous Legislative Assembly for the Leader of the Opposition.

I refer to page six of the Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy of the Northern Territory Government. There is a paragraph that talks about the values and principles of community engagement. It talks about the need to work together, and states the following:

- Relationships are established, maintained and based on trust*
- Ways of engagement are place-based to suit local needs, language, time-frames and cultural protocols*
- Participation is relevant and representative*
- All points of view are freely expressed, heard and understood*
- Effective engagement is based on dialogue and active listening ...*

That is the most important point. Lastly, this section states:

- Quality communication and coordination occurs within and across levels of government, other stakeholders and remote community members.*

They are all good points and essential ingredients to working in partnership with remote communities.

On pages eight and nine the document provides best-practice guidelines for remote engagement and coordination. One of the key focus areas is timing. Under the timing section on page nine the document states:

- *Avoid rushing—allow time and flexibility to build relationships and enable maximum participation*
- *Allow time for community members and other stakeholders to understand and provide input into the project, opportunity or issue.*

They are all very important and essential actions that we will follow in delivering our remote housing reforms.

I am concerned that the Leader of the Opposition has put forward this motion. I do not think he has read this resource, produced by the previous government, as he is asking us to dictate to communities what they will be given under the remote housing program. He is asking me to pre-empt how people will make decisions about what to build, how to build and where to build, the number of houses to be constructed and where they will be constructed, over the next 10 years.

While I am glad the Leader of the Opposition is interested in the subject, his motion misses the point. We will undertake these reforms in partnership with Indigenous communities, and this will take time. The deficit in remote housing has been created over decades and any plan to address it must be long term. When we get this right we will be more successful in our attempts to address other social issues, such as health and education in remote communities. These remote housing reforms are essential and they will provide Indigenous Territorians with a better base on which to build a life, find employment and develop their communities. We are investing in housing to address social disadvantage and change the future in remote and regional areas, and tackle the problems associated with disadvantage in future years.

We are engaging with people to ensure we get this right. For example, we have already heard from a number of people that some local communities may not want to take on tenancy management. This will be tested through further consultation. However, where it is not wanted this does not mean it will be devolved to local groups; other options can be considered. Last week the federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, announced a review into remote housing. He endorses Labor's plan to engage with local communities and said:

... the Indigenous-led review would consult and engage with Indigenous communities and businesses, housing service providers, peak bodies, Land Councils and state governments.

His review endorses our policy; it includes the Territory government. I look forward to meeting with Senator Scullion to discuss these important issues. I welcome his letter and his invitation to meet.

We are hoping to bring in the Australian Government as a partner in funding the remote housing program. Senator Scullion's language gives us hope that together we can deliver better housing and local employment, and the social benefits that go with it.

It is important that we work with communities to identify their readiness and ability to engage. This reform must be done in partnership. It will not be driven from a government agenda; it needs to be done hand-in-hand with Indigenous communities. Assessing a community's readiness is an important aspect of moving forward if we are to achieve our goals.

Community readiness can be articulated in three stages:

- Ready, where the community is ready to engage with good structures and governance in place. The community has an ability to move forward.
- Partly ready, where the community can engage but will need some support regarding governance. Time will be needed to move forward to work out the best model.
- Not ready, where the community struggles to engage and has no delivery capacity. Potentially there are land tenure issues and other complex issues.

It is about working out the best model that is flexible, adaptable and place-based so it can cater for all stages of readiness. The model also needs to accommodate Top End and Central Australian needs, varying population numbers, organisation capacities and other opportunities and obstacles.

The Department of Housing and Community Development is currently undertaking an extensive mapping exercise to determine the current housing situation and potential future needs, existing organisations to undertake building works, and repairs and maintenance. It may include, but is not limited to, immediate capacity; ability to increase capacity over time; staffing profile; tools and equipment profile; organisation governance and compliance capacity; and land capacity issues.

To support the mapping exercise, place-based consultation with each community is under way. Because of the need to fully involve local decision makers, the engagement process needs to be well-considered and thorough. Programming of works will consider the ability for local participation in the delivery of works, with the intention of local economic development and the development of locally-based skills to manage housing stock into the future. Five-year funding arrangements will be available to allow enterprises to plan employment and training packages that will allow individuals to undertake apprenticeships or traineeships in relevant trades.

We have commenced the engagement process and are employing a range of strategies to continue this process. For example, a written invitation is being sent to begin engagement, with engagement officers to follow up in person. Consultations have already begun in a number of communities, with engagement plans being developed for dozens of others with high capacity for delivery. Community consultation is seeking interest from individuals and organisations in communities that do not currently have construction capability to determine how they can participate in the program in future years.

A local decision-making framework will be established, initially utilising existing bodies, including housing reference groups and local authorities. Where appropriate, a focused effort will be undertaken on reinforcing those bodies and developing their capacity to take on increased decision-making responsibilities.

Understandably, many local communities want to see the works commence under the \$1.1bn 10-year program. The funding commences on 1 July 2017, the first new Labor government budget. We have listened and, through working with communities, we have identified the need to bring funds forward. That is why the Northern Territory Government has announced that \$15m of the \$1.1bn remote housing program will be brought forward to assist with improving housing in remote Indigenous communities. There will be \$10m to build additional bedrooms and living spaces in existing houses through the Room to Breathe program, which is the Northern Territory Government's program to ease overcrowding in existing houses.

Room to Breathe was implemented to immediately improve housing conditions in communities which have not had significant housing investment, or have high rates of overcrowding despite previous housing investment. Through building additional bedrooms or extending living areas, Room to Breathe increases culturally appropriate living options, reduces wear and tear on houses, and can be completed quickly.

A total of \$5m of the money brought forward will be spent on repairs and maintenance for existing houses in addition to funding available under the national partnership on remote housing. Bringing this funding forward will not only increase the capacity of housing in remote communities, but it will give a boost to construction and Indigenous business sectors.

In addition to the government reforms, there are existing program works worth over \$300m under the national partnership for remote housing and the Remote Australia Strategies, which are now occurring in Indigenous communities. This includes over 350 new and replacement houses, and over 1000 house upgrades to many remote NT communities.

Repairs and maintenance programs continue under the national partnership for remote housing and are under existing contracts until July 2018. Some examples of that include \$3.1m committed, year to date, in the big rivers region; \$2.3m in Arafura region remote communities; \$2.5m in Arnhem remote communities; \$5.8m in central remote communities; and \$0.81m in Barkly remote communities.

The Leader of the Opposition's motion also relates to government employee housing. We have heard loud and clear about the need for Indigenous recruits to have access to government employee housing in their own communities. Remote community residents who have gained qualifications and want to work for the government in their communities should be housed appropriately. Community residents should have the

same level of access to government employee housing as those who are recruited from outside to work in their community. This about levelling the playing field and doing what is right.

The provision of government employee housing for locally recruited government employees is part of the Northern Territory Government's 10-year, \$1.1bn remote housing investment program. This initiative will provide \$200m between 2017 and 2027 for additional government employee housing for locally recruited government employees.

The Department of Housing and Community Development is currently working with agencies to understand the housing needs of individual employees, matching that to the housing stock available. Consideration has also been given to the mix of existing government employee housing and public housing in communities. We need to ensure that the use of remote housing is maximised through matching eligible government employees to the right sized housing.

There is much work to be done in this area; it is complex, but it will be a great outcome. Consultation and planning is under way and it is anticipated that construction will commence in 2017-18.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, we are committed to working with Indigenous people living in remote communities, and making a difference regarding their housing needs. We intend to do this through partnerships and active listening. We know the need is great but we want to get it right, so we will not rush; we will listen. We will work towards our policy of local decision-making.

The Remote Engagement and Coordination Strategy includes a quote from a resident at Ntaria who said that decisions should be made:

By listening to locals rather than deciding before they come what they want to hear ...

This quote is exactly why we cannot support the Leader of the Opposition's motion. We will not decide here and now in the Chamber. We want to hear from local people. We have been listening and we will continue to listen and act upon what we hear.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, congratulations on your first time in the Chair. If you can work out all the technical details of that Chair you are doing well.

I heard the minister say he would not support this motion. I understand that some of the motion may require the government to provide a number. In light of what he said in relation to finding out what locals want, it makes sense. However, on the other hand, if he will not support the motion then I thought he would at least partially support it, because it is a good motion. Especially as this government is now starting its term in office, it is a good time for us to debate this issue.

As the minister would know, once upon a time we had the Council of Territory Cooperation, which traveled many miles to look at Aboriginal housing under SIHIP. I am a little concerned that statements are being made as if people have forgotten what happened. There was consultation with many communities under SIHIP. The government lost a member of Cabinet because someone said it was spending too much time on the administrative side, and part of that was people discussing with local communities what sort of housing they wanted.

I was on Bathurst Island when there was a community group of mainly locals, as well as some people from Darwin, who all sat down in the dust over a number of days to look at a range of options for housing. That was being looked at as the start of SIHIP on Bathurst Island. The minister has been over to Milikapiti recently; I was there with the then Minister for Housing, Dr Burns, and we went through many houses there because we were checking on the rehabilitation program, getting an understanding of the problems associated with steel houses being next to the sea. We walked into houses where floors were rusted out and you could see the weeds coming up through the floor. There was difficulty in maintaining, using or rehabilitating those houses.

We went to Pirlangimpi, Garden Point, and noticed the difference in the houses there. They were mainly made of block and were not affected by the salt. There was much community discussion. We visited Santa Teresa and met the Member for Stuart a number of times in his days with Ingkerreke. I hope he will speak on this issue because he has firsthand knowledge of issues in relation to Aboriginal housing. He had to do a lot of work on maintaining the houses.

I remember the debate about houses in Santa Teresa, where the council was doing the verandas, SIHIP was doing the insides and someone else was doing the footpaths. There were three lots of people doing the work.

What was the program before Work for the Dole?

Mr McConnell: CDEP.

Mr WOOD: Yes. CDEP, SIHIP and the council were all working on one house. People were looking at what was being done—there were mistakes. One alliance was removed.

Looking back, even with the concerns about housing prices—sometimes I think people have forgotten that there was a great deal of good work done through SIHIP. There were issues, though. Look at the infrastructure that went into Maningrida—sewerage, water, roads. They may not all be perfect, but if the essential headworks and infrastructure had not got off the ground it would never have happened. I understand the argument that there was no increase in the number of rooms, but there was a change in the housing situation, from dilapidated houses that had gone well past their use-by date to modern housing. At Bathurst Island the number of rooms would have increased. If you go there now there are a lot more houses than when I was there.

We must be careful not to look at this as if there were no good programs before. There was consultation with various groups. The CTC kept an eye on what was going on. The minister spoke of extensive mapping systems. Some of that was happening in the days of SIHIP. I remember seeing plans released by the department four or five years ago. They are possibly out of date. Surely some of those plans were being made previously.

I imagine there were people who studied demographics in the communities, looking at the provision of future infrastructure. How much water would be needed for the community if there were so many houses? Where is the sewerage, water and electricity at present and where would they have to be extended? What upgrades would be required if you put another 20 houses in a community? I thought some of that information would be available.

We had a program where you could go to the website and check each community.

Mr McCarthy: We are mapping the capacity to do the work.

Mr WOOD: That is right.

Mr McCarthy: It is about engaging the locals.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I understand that, but you spoke about some of the information coming from within the government. That information should already be available. It might need updating.

Sometimes I get the impression that nothing was done previously, but a lot of things were done. I am trying to think of the name of the website where you could look up each community. It was a mapping process under the Lands and Planning site. You could find out where things were for each community. I cannot think of the name ...

Ms Purick: BushTel.

Mr WOOD: Yes, BushTel, but there are other sites as well.

I hope we do not go back to ground zero; I hope we use the information we already have. Working with the community is the number one priority, but the community needs people who will give them the information to make sure they make the right decisions. As an example, when I was at Bathurst Island the community council decided on a piece of land for a new suburb near the forestry plantation. That land was chosen because the rest of the land was unsuitable. They have since used some of that unsuitable land because they had the money for drainage and other works, but, at the time, the community realised there was one parcel of land that was not wet and they could build on it. With the right knowledge the community made the right decision.

I support the idea that the community needs to go forward, but it needs to make sure that when it makes decisions the experts are there to provide advice, such as, 'If you put a suburb here you need to spend

about \$5m on sewerage, which is about 10 houses we cannot build. If we put it over here, it might cost less for infrastructure and we could build a few more houses.’ That is the kind of cooperative approach you need from government and the community. If you bring the community along they must have the knowledge to make good decisions that do not waste money so they get the best outcome.

We need to sit down with communities and ask them what they want. That was done previously, but there is a limited bucket of money for housing. There is a problem in communities with overcrowding. I mentioned this morning, when we were talking about stamp duty, that you can go around parts of Rapid Creek or the suburbs of Palmerston and see basic houses that are quite good. They might look old compared to the new styles, but they are basic houses with three or four bedrooms, a hallway, toilet and shower down one end and the kitchen up the other end—fundamentally quite a good house. But we have stepped away from that.

Many of the houses I looked at when I was with the CTC were what I would call pretty fancy houses with good, solid construction because we had to make them last for 40 years. But they were very expensive. As people have said, no additional bedrooms were delivered under the program. In some cases there were, but in others not.

There is a limited amount of money. When sitting down with the community do we give them a choice? Some people might say, ‘We can build 10 houses of this fancy style or we can build 20 of this plain style which will achieve a better outcome for your community than having a house that looks like it came out of a flash suburb in Palmerston’. Usually those houses are privately constructed.

If we are to achieve a real dint in overcrowding, and this issue will not stop in the short term, then we have to think about how best we can spend the money to achieve the outcome we need and still have healthy looking houses. I do not think the old-style houses are any healthier than newer houses. You make sure the showers and toilets are properly constructed and the kitchen is adequate. Those houses are well ventilated because they have louvres.

Another example is Batchelor, the mining town. Look at those old houses. I nearly bought one there many years ago. They are basic and cool. If we are looking at this program again, we need to get best value for money and, hopefully, help the government achieve its objectives. This is not me knocking the government, by the way; I am just putting ideas out.

I have said before that you also have to look at whether the local companies can build houses in communities. Bathurst Island had and still has a housing association, which constructed kit homes. Those houses have lasted; some of them are still standing now. They were called Peterson houses and they came in a big pack. They were basically rooms with a breezeway between them. Some of them had to be refurbished and some had to be pulled down, but they were a good house that lasted and did not cost a fortune.

The Catholic missions put in Segal houses before that, which were a breezeway with rooms on either side. I think the Member for Nhulunbuy might be able to speak on this. There were opportunities for people to use local materials. I go to Daly River, or Nauiyu as it is called today—if you go there you will see the older houses made out of hand-made bricks and sand from the crossing. You could hear the banging all day. I can still hear it in my head even now. Somebody made up the mixture in the cement mixer and poured it in, and the machine went ‘bang, bang, bang’. Then that got shifted out and someone filled it up again. That was their day job.

Those houses have been there since 1970 or 1971 and are still standing. They have been through I do not know how many floods. They were constructed locally out of local materials. We need to look at that as another way of getting a good outcome and spending that money well.

There are some smaller communities that neither SIHIP nor NPARIH delivered new houses to. A number of communities are called outstations, but to some extent they are somewhere between an outstation and a town in size. One example is Emu Point, which has people who sit around for half a day, doing some work under the ...

Mr Costa: RJCP.

Mr WOOD: Yes. For half of the day they rake some leaves and clean up around the place, which is fair enough, but for the rest of the day they do nothing. I was told they are probably on ganja. They have nothing to do, but they have overcrowding in their homes.

When I spoke to Terry Sams I said, 'Are there any materials around? We could start making blocks.' He said yes. Perhaps all they need is a backhoe, a truck, a brick-making machine and to use the CDEP money to top funds up to pay a decent wage. Then they can get people to start building their own houses. Obviously you will need a qualified carpenter to make sure the house is straight. We need to put those options out there. It creates employment and puts pride in the community because they can build houses, which will then reduce overcrowding.

There were a lot of people in Terry Sams' house. No houses have been built there since ATSIC days. That place has grown, but there are no more houses. Emu Point is a beautiful place, I must admit. The funny thing is the government has put extra facilities there. There is a nice school, a clinic and the most fantastic preschool, but they do not have any more housing. We have places for the kids to go, but nowhere for them to live. We have not quite kept up with the population growth. When the government is planning for these kinds of areas, maybe it needs to look at other options.

I want to know what the government will do about extra housing in places like Emu Point. They are permanent places; they are not outstations in the Dry and empty in the Wet. They are places where people live. It would be good to know if the government will try to allow some housing growth in those areas. I like the idea—there is always a fancy name every time a new government comes in—of Room to Breathe. In the next four years someone else will call it 'bigger house', or 'room for grandma'. The idea is you can add another room onto a house—good idea.

You have to remember that part of the discussion, when this new housing program started, was based on the *Little Children are Sacred* report. There was a design that had to be in accordance with some of the things written in that report. If people add a room onto a building, I imagine there would have to be someone to oversee whether that could create issues. I am not saying it is a good idea or a bad idea. If you can add a room on you can reduce overcrowding. I remember that when the design work was done for some of the original houses it had to fit according to what the *Little Children are Sacred* report had raised as a concern with regard to housing.

Employing locals has always been an issue. It used to cause jealousy, if I can call it that. If there were two teachers, the non-local would get a nice house and ...

Mr KIRBY: A point of order, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker! I request an extension of time for the member, pursuant to Standing Order 43.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WOOD: People would feel upset when they had a similar job to a non-local but had to go back to an old house. I raised the same issue about Emu Point with the previous government. There is a house for the principal, which is only a single room at the back of the school. The teachers do not have anything. It has been of concern for a long time.

Territory Housing had programs for tenancy management in houses. People in the community were in charge of that. There were groups of people who helped people get into a new house and showed them what needed to be done. There was also the issue of who should get a house. That is an important issue that we must be mindful of. When we say locals should make local decisions we must make sure there is no nepotism. Houses need to be given out to the neediest, which can be variable. It could be a small house for a pensioner versus a family with five or six children. We have to make sure people do not get houses because someone knows someone else or says that because they are a traditional owner they want a big house.

They are public houses. The government is paying for them. The government should give houses based on need, not who the person is. Public housing does not discriminate; a family needs a house and you have to make sure there are no issues in relation to that. It is not easy in a small community. Sometimes the person with the loudest voice gets the largest house, but it is public housing.

There is also the issue of leasing, which is difficult. I do not know if the Member for Nhulunbuy wants to touch on this. I am a bit lost with leasing issues; there are 99-year leases, 40-year leases, individual leases and township leases. It might be the case that the government takes each community on its merit and there will be a different system for each community.

What about private housing? There is a reliance on public housing. Why are we not promoting people to own their own house on a community? What are the stumbling blocks? I know there have been papers

written on this. The federal government has done work on this. Where are we at with the provision of private housing, where people can buy their own house and are not dependant on this process?

Nowhere else in Australia are you totally dependent on having a house built for you by the government. I cannot see any reason for some of the community royalty payments not to be invested into housing. It does not belong to the government; the royalties belong to the community. Maybe they could have a package of housing which they could manage themselves, although they would have to fit within existing infrastructure. There has not been enough discussion about that. Relying on government housing to solve this problem should not be the only way we do things.

I thank the opposition for bringing this forward. It is an important issue. I do not raise these issues to criticise what the government is doing, because this is basically a continuation of a program that has been going on since the ALP was in power eight years ago.

I hope we have learned from mistakes and that we get it right. The key to overcoming the issue, and one of the main reasons there is such a lot of money being spent here, is not only to make sure people live in healthy communities—that is a key to having better housing—but also to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. Some of these issues can be attributed not only to alcohol, but to people living very close together.

The fundamental issue is that overcrowding is not a great way for a family and for children to grow up. If you want the children in these communities to stay awake in school and not fall asleep because they have not slept or have not had anything to eat due to there being so many people in the family that they had no food, then you have to look at the issue's many aspects.

I would rather see twice as many cheaper houses and get a downward trend on overcrowding than a house that might be satisfying to designers in Canberra. That would achieve a nice house, but it does not achieve what we are trying to achieve: to make life better for people in those communities.

Mr HIGGINS (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank those who spoke on this motion. I am a bit disappointed that some of the other bush members in this parliament did not speak. This motion is not meant as a slight or an attack on government. It is simply a motion that asks for some information.

The current housing policy is five or six pages long. I am trying to get an understanding of what the government's plans are for the future—\$1.1bn is a lot of money—and over what time frame people will be consulted and how.

The Member for Nelson raised some very good points. Some things need to be taken into account when looking at what we will do with remote housing. Remote housing is a problem, much like alcohol. It is not a problem that nobody recognises. We all recognise that there is a big problem and we need a lot more houses as quickly as we can get them.

The Member for Nelson talked about Emu Point and it reminded me of some of the things that have been done there. Someone could ask the question, 'Is that how we will implement the Room to Breathe program?' Talking about Terry Sams' house—these houses have verandahs. The first thing I saw was that there were tents on the verandahs. Is that room to breathe?

More recently they have gotten corrugated iron from some of the original houses that were built with the timber posts from where they chopped the trees down. There are many of those old ones lying around out at Peppi as well. They have taken that iron and closed in the rooms. If we think these people cannot be involved in this and, as the Member for Nelson mentioned, make blocks and do up some of their own houses with a little help—they can. They are ingenious; they have been around a hell of a lot longer than we have.

Look at Wudapuli and Nama, the Mal Brough district. I would be proud to have one of those houses, they are tops. They are great weekenders for the people who live in Wadeye. There is nothing else out there. There is actually a preschool in Nama, which is not used. On election day we went out there. Two people rocked up to vote and that was it. They rocked up on the back of a tractor. The rest of the houses were empty. There needs to be some work on getting people into the houses. It is broader than just building houses; there is a whole picture you have to look at.

It is a bit like education. When we were in Canberra we spoke to Senator Birmingham about education. It is not just a matter of educating kids and throwing money into education. There is a whole stack of health

issues that need to be addressed at the same time. You need to create jobs, otherwise people will just say, 'Why do I need an education?' You need an education to get a job. 'There are no jobs so, therefore, I do not need an education.'

That is a vicious circle. If your parents do not have a job then you do not necessarily get kicked out of bed in the morning to go to school. Most people in this Chamber would know about their parents' jobs. That helped us get up and go to school to get an education, because our parents had to go to work.

The Member for Nelson was saying that, yes, there is a stack of ways of looking at this. The purpose of this motion is to try to get a handle on the time frame for this. What are the plans? At this stage all we have is a five-page document. From a critical point of view, how do you make a decision to spend \$1.1bn on a five-page document? Surely there must be some more plans around, so we are just trying to flush those out.

It is good to hear words like 'consultation', 'engagement' and 'listening'. They are all well and good. We are getting some controlled tasks put into place, but none of those things give us houses. Did all those things need to be done? Either way, I admire people for doing them.

As the Member for Nelson said, some of that information should already be available. We need to collect that. We need to add another word to 'consultation', 'engagement' and 'listening', and that word is 'collecting'. These are all motherhood statements. We are after more detail. I have had people ask me questions—and I know they will increase—such as 'When?', 'How many?', 'How will it be paid for?' and 'How do we get input?' They are questions that need to be asked.

You have only been in government for 88 days, but surely some of these answers were there, some basic information, before you committed \$1.1bn over 10 years, which is \$100m a year. I have heard the minister today say the government will fast-track \$15m. I will speak to him later about that. At half a million a house that is 30 houses. I am not sure how it relates to the \$100m. It would be good if we could see when the houses will be built.

As I said in the alcohol motion, I am disappointed that some people did not speak on it. It was not meant as a way of picking on government. I do not think I picked on government in my opening remarks. I said that we had some questions we would like answered. They are questions included in the motions. They are not all the questions we might want to ask, but it gives the government an indication of the sort of information we are seeking.

It is our role as an opposition to hold you to account. We ask you these questions to keep you on your toes and make sure you are delivering. Your constituents expect that as much as ours do. It is important that we raise these issues in this House.

I commend the motion to the parliament and we will leave it at that.

The Assembly divided.

Ayes 6

Mrs Finocchiaro
Mr Guyula
Mr Higgins
Mrs Lambley
Mr Mills
Mr Wood

Noes 17

Ms Ah Kit
Mr Collins
Mr Costa
Ms Fyles
Mr Gunner
Mr Kirby
Ms Lawler
Mr McCarthy
Mr McConnell
Ms Manison
Ms Moss
Mr Paech
Mr Sievers
Ms Uibo
Mr Vowles
Ms Wakefield
Mrs Worden

Motion not agreed to.

MOTION
Local Business and Jobs Creation

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly calls on the Territory government to take seriously the importance of local businesses for the creation of jobs in the Northern Territory.

This motion is timely, as the track record of this Gunner government gives Territorians no confidence that it can deliver real action on jobs and growth. Labor has given us ministerial statements, advisory councils and lots of talk, but not so much action.

With respect to the ministerial statement on jobs, if that is the best the Territory business community and working families can look forward to in regard to job creation and a sustainable infrastructure plan, then we, the Northern Territory, are in serious trouble. It is deeply concerning that after nearly three months in government Labor has no coherent plan for the economy. The Labor government, which spent years in opposition and the past three months bashing the Country Liberals for economic mismanagement, now continues to use our budget. If it was not so embarrassing it would be funny.

Labor is waiting for the outcomes of economic summits to craft a plan, which seems like a cop-out for making the tough decisions it will have to make to fulfil its election commitments. Treasury pointed to a \$220m gap between the budget and its costing. This is the Gunner gap, a black hole that the government will have to make some really tough decisions to fill. The Gunner gap is the black hole where a real plan for jobs and growth should be. While it works out ways to juggle the books to close the Gunner gap, Territory businesses remain uncertain about their prospects.

So far, the measures the government has taken have been about creating political jobs and not real jobs in the outside world. It has given all its backbenchers jobs. Instead of being called backbenchers, which is a completely justifiable and dignified position in this parliament, they have been falsely promoted to assistant ministers, a position which has no standing or recognition in this parliament. That has been tried and tested, and proven true.

This government has given two of its failed election candidates liaison-style jobs upstairs that will provide them with a platform to recontest their seats next term. This government has recruited many of the same staff, locally and from interstate, who were part of the team that so badly mismanaged the Territory's economy previously and saddled us with a \$5.5bn projected debt.

It paid homage to its union mates by forcing penalty rates on small businesses, and we are starting to unpack the true cost to business of that snap decision by the Gunner government.

We have not heard boo from the Chief Minister about the shedding of 450 jobs at INPEX. What does the jobs statement do about retaining those workers in the Territory should they wish to remain here?

Then there is the issue of the two part-day public holidays. That has had the countereffect of reducing jobs, with some of the Territory's leading restaurants saying they will not open their doors on Christmas and New Year's Eves. The most sensible part of that so-called plan was a commitment to deliver existing government facilitated nation-building and Territory-building infrastructure and investment projects like the luxury hotel and the shiplift. In other words, work previously done by the Country Liberal government.

In his statement the Chief Minister spoke about being agile, smart and flexible, but in the first 88 days of this government we have not seen any of the skills that were talked about. The Chief Minister talks about openness and transparency, but where was the openness and transparency about the so-called partial public holidays?

The Chief Minister's moratorium on fracking is a handbrake on the economy. We look forward to that handbrake being disengaged as soon as possible.

Territorians are seriously concerned about the looming jobs cliff. Territory businesses are concerned about the economy and the government's lack of leadership in response to the INPEX transition phase. In Labor's Northern Territory jobs plan, called Productivity, Participation, Population, it says there will be an attempt to chase major projects. There is no plan for local business and job creation.

Labor has been content to stick with the Country Liberals' budget, but happily claimed a raft of the Country Liberals' major projects as their own. What new major projects is the government chasing? Where are the results from the trip to China?

Territorians want their government to actively hunt new major projects and be aggressive but optimistic about creating jobs for locals. There is a lack of a jobs target. A pathway to major projects to replace Ichthys or a commitment around infrastructure spending were glaring omissions in the Chief Minister's statement on jobs. Clearly Labor has no plan around jobs beyond the upcoming summits, which, essentially, are a stalling mechanism while the government tries to sort through the jumble of its election commitments.

The most sensible part of the Chief Minister's statement was his commitment to deliver existing government nation-building and Territory-building infrastructure and investment projects like the luxury hotel, the shiplift and the Tennant Creek to Mount Isa railway, and to develop the next generation of opportunities.

Construction businesses in Darwin and Alice Springs are making decisions today about how their businesses will operate over the next few years and whether they are employing staff or letting them go. The list of upcoming projects, and where and when they will happen, is not a matter of casual interest for them; it is fundamental to the survival of their businesses.

The private sector deserves much more from this government than simply being lumped with additional penalty payments on Christmas and New Year's Eves. Any government, especially a Territory government, should, in the first instance, not make employing Territorians more difficult, which is what the current government has done. The Labor Gunner government has no focus on wealth creation. It has been very good at spending money, but spending money is easy. Running up debt and deficit is easy. What is really hard is creating new and enduring wealth. Priorities are what we are talking about in this debate. Priorities of government are important. They set the tone and the agenda. The priority of this government should be making it easier for businesses to employ Territorians and making it easier to create more jobs, not more difficult.

The Gunner government has the economic growth formula backwards and its members are pessimists. Labor, by its actions, believes that it is too hard to grow that pie, so it only wants to concern itself with slicing up the existing one. The Minister for Primary Industry and Resources said in this place yesterday:

... the economy is buggered.

That was in a contribution to the ministerial statement on infrastructure.

Our Country Liberal Party believes strongly that it is all about jobs, and the policy settings and signals being sent to businesses should say that we want to make it easy to create jobs in the Northern Territory. In 2012 the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, or SDA, agreed to the introduction of similar legislation in South Australia, with the aim of getting retail trade back into the city. However, if you ask any local in the retail or hospitality sector about additional public holidays and penalty rates, they will tell you there is potential for loss of vitality in the CBD, as many businesses will not open because of the additional operating costs on those days. That evidence is now being borne out here in the Territory.

It may appear to be an easy decision for the unions to make. For them it is about more money for the workers; however, the point that is always missed by the union movement is that workers will not get paid if the business is not open or viable.

This decision was not made with hard-working Territorians in mind. It was made as part of the SDA union expanding its borders and influence into the Northern Territory. If the Gunner government is serious about transparency and looking after hard-working Territorians, it should start by listening to the retail and hospitality sector, not just the unions, and reverse its decision until an objective assessment of the cost and productivity to business can be carried out by a parliamentary committee.

How does this measure support the Territory going forward? How does it support jobs and growth? This is a retrograde, regressive, anti-jobs job in the eye for Territorians. These bizarre half-day public holidays will close businesses, prevent services being delivered, increase red tape, cost jobs, increase inflation and, at the end of the day, the whole Territory will suffer as a result of this deal.

In South Australia, Restaurant and Catering SA Chief Executive, Sally Neville, said her members advised her they would shut their doors if these half-day public holidays are legislated. As night follows day, it happened. Restaurants closed, employees lost shifts and punters went hungry.

Territorians know that when restaurants' doors shut and they are looking for somewhere to eat and cannot find a suitable venue, they can blame the SDA and the Gunner government. This move is no more than an inexperienced, myopic government paying back an election debt to their union masters. Informing is not consulting. Why was the Chief Minister not straight with the people of the Northern Territory before the election?

There is so much potential in our Territory. Agriculture is one of the keys for unlocking sustainable growth. Investing in agribusiness and research and innovation makes sense. The Territory needs far-sighted, future-focused policy as part of its plan to secure prosperity. As a Territory we need to become better at innovation. The previous Country Liberal government had a strategy to align policy settings to make maximum gain from the national science and innovation agenda.

By Australian standards agriculture in the NT, which is valued at around \$600m per year, is in the early stage of its development. This is a targeted approach that invests in science and innovation, and puts agriculture and agribusiness on the front foot into the future.

On the subject of exporting produce and growing markets in Southeast Asia, the Country Liberal government invested \$2m in the development of a vapour heat treatment facility to be built in the NT. This facility will be of enormous importance to many mango farmers across the Territory. Getting online is getting ahead, and the people living in our remote communities should have the same opportunity to basic access that other Territorians enjoy. Labor's policy prescriptions amount to little more than pagans to profligacy and perfidy. Labor's only interest is Labor, not the Territory and not a sustainable economy or working families in the Daly.

The previous government invested in world-class fishing infrastructure. This investment has made the NT the place to be for recreational fishing. The Barra Classic in the Daly is a world-class event, and we achieved that by investing over \$4m in the Dundee boat ramp with money for Mary River and Shady Camp roads.

Arts and cultural tourism will become ever important, and with an ever-expanding middle class in Asia it presents an incredible opportunity for the Territory. We need to be ready to capitalise on that boom. There are abundant opportunities in the tourism, education, employment and science sectors. This investment will also provide job opportunities for Aboriginal people in the area and broader economic opportunities for the region.

It is apparent from the Chief Minister's actions that his approach to consultation is fundamentally broken. The evidence before this parliament and the Territory public is that:

1. the Chief Minister is confusing informing with consulting. At this time, more than any other in our history, with significant economic headwinds ahead and a looming jobs cliff, it is critical that the government understands and enacts true consultation
2. not being in possession of the number pertaining to jobs that would be lost or created by this measure, and having made no effort to find out how many jobs would be lost
3. the premise and argument used to justify this measure that it will grow the Territory's population. The Chief Minister has failed to provide any basis or evidence for this logic
4. there have been no detailed costings undertaken by the government as to the direct or indirect cost of these new half-day public holiday measures.
5. the modelling, if any, has been done on the cost and effect of population growth rates and has not been made public. No feedback mechanism has been put in place, and this constitutes a serious breach of trust.
6. the \$184m in public service jobs that the Gunner government tried to hide when releasing its costings, just 24 hours before the election.

Finally we raise the spectre of the jobs cliff, the big hole that will exist in private sector employment when major projects currently at the construction phase transition to the production phase of their operations. For the above reasons the opposition, along with the cross bench, believes that this is an arrogant, inexperienced government. This motion is about jobs and growth. It is about getting the Territory back on track.

Jobs in every corner of the Territory from Wanguri to Wadeye, Anula to Alice—given that mining's contribution to the Territory's economy is over \$2.75bn, 12% of the Territory's gross state product for the financial year 2014–15, and generates \$656 000 for the economy for every worker employed, why is there no mention of extractive industries in the jobs plan?

Should we tell the people in the mining industry that instead of a jobs plan the Gunner government is implementing a jobs ban? The Gunner government promised to be a government of action, but Territorians have only had inaction. This motion is about lifters. It is about creating more jobs and more growth.

Territorians have always known entrepreneurial heroes, such as Bob and Dan Richards at Humpty Doo Barramundi, which started producing 300 kilograms of saltwater barramundi 22 years ago and is now producing 33 000 kilograms each week; Nick Hanigan, yet another generation in the Paspaley family, which has also demonstrated enormous commitment to northern Australia; the people at TFS, which is growing the world's largest Indian sandalwood plantation here in northern Australia; not to mention all the dedicated people working at INPEX, Ichthys and ConocoPhillips LNG, Darwin's most significant major projects, which are a testament to the confidence of our global investment partners that they have a future here in the Territory.

It is time to get local business moving again. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr GUNNER (Chief Minister): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise in support of the motion. We need to take seriously the importance of local business for the creation of jobs in the Northern Territory. I cannot agree with the majority of the content of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition's contribution, but we support the importance of local business.

I found it extraordinary listening to the Member for Spillett, the final acknowledgement by the CLP that there is an INPEX construction phase and that it will wind down. We saw the CLP over the last four years almost ignore this and not plan ahead for what we will have to deal with this term. It is one of the real issues that underlined the work of the CLP during its last term—the chaos of the CLP.

The CLP inherited, in 2012, a confident, growing Northern Territory. Through four years of scandals, financial mismanagement, policy errors and other mistakes we now see ourselves, towards the end of 2016, without having inherited a coherent plan from the CLP on how to deal with the post-INPEX construction phase. That is obviously the hard work for government in this term. We have very much taken that on board; we know what happened over the last four years. We saw the net interstate migration issues. We saw the large and growing budget deficit. The CLP managed to sell everything, spend the money and spend some more.

Obviously we knew about the budget problem coming in to this term, the \$900m deficit. We recognise the problems that we have and the hard work we will do this term with Territorians to ensure we grow the Territory again. It is very important that we grow the Northern Territory. I will be working very closely with all my Cabinet colleagues to do that because there is no simple solution. It requires effort across several areas. Some of the areas of importance were touched upon by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and I will get to that as I talk.

I think the CLP members still have not learned their lesson from the last term about the importance of working with all sectors of the economy. We made it very clear that when we deliver our first budget in 2017–18 it will be fully shaped through consultation across all sectors in the Northern Territory.

We will get it right from our first budget, which I think is critical. We made that clear in opposition and we are doing that in government. We will hold our economic summits and make sure, as a government, we get it right from our first budget. We will have a long-term infrastructure plan, which is currently missing in the Northern Territory. It will be shaped in full consultation with those sectors.

We will put that in place. It is my intention, by having buy-in from across the Northern Territory, that it becomes a bipartisan infrastructure plan because its value will be jointly owned. When there are changes of government in the future, as there will be, that infrastructure plan will survive the change of government

so investors have the confidence to invest in the Northern Territory. Our public infrastructure plans unlock private sector investment. That was our plan coming in: get the money flowing locally, create certainty and restore confidence. That will be provided by delivering on those long-term plans that people can believe, see and touch. It was raised with me consistently in opposition, and now in government, that people could not pick up that long-term plan and believe in it.

One of the running jokes was the Adelaide to Darwin railway, which was promised for 90 years. We have to do better than that when we talk about major infrastructure projects in Australian and the Northern Territory. We need plans that people can believe in. We will be working across sectors and the community to make sure that from our first budget we get it right and that we have shared plans which people can believe in. That is the work we will do as a government, because we have listened to Territorians.

Since being elected one of the other promises I made was that we would not be a government that stops things purely for political reasons—the idea of doing 180s or putting on the hand brake. We have kept pushing out that CLP capital works budget. We saw \$81m spent in October alone, which I understand was the largest amount of money spent in a month under the capital works program. Much of that business is going to locals because we strengthened those Buy Local plans. In the week after winning the election one of the first things I did was sit down with the Chamber of Commerce and the Manufacturers Council, tightening up our Buy Local plans and making sure we are giving locals a fair crack at it.

Maybe the Member for Spillett's speech was not updated the following Monday, because she missed the fact we flagged, going to the election, that we would defer \$220m of infrastructure works into the 2020–21 year. This was not to change the level of economic activity in the NT; it was substitution. In fact, we are spending \$100m more than the CLP did because we recognise the need for stimulus in the 2017–18 and 2018–19 financial years. We diverted \$100m out of that northern Infrastructure fund to make sure we were spending extra capital. We are spending more money over the next four years—when you compare those promises going to the election—because we recognise the need to respond to the post-INPEX construction phase. We increased the amount of economic activity occurring in the Territory, and we deferred a number of works into that 2020–21 year, but more works took their place because we invested an extra \$100m into infrastructure in the NT, recognising the need to provide jobs for Territorians.

Our plan coming into government was to get money flowing locally by changing those Buy Local plans, and we had to get extra money flowing into construction because that is one of the main creators of jobs in the NT. We added that \$100m, which we had planned to do coming into government. In restructuring that pipeline of infrastructure works we wanted to ensure there was a mix of packages across the Territory economy, providing jobs. You have seen us rearranging that pipeline of works, and we have 37 new or brought-forward works to make sure we are delivering jobs for Territorians so they get a return on that investment, whether it is the Berrimah export yards that determine how we will improve our live export trade or the multistorey carpark at Royal Darwin Hospital, which we heard criticised last night. When people go to the hospital they should not be aggravated by the parking, which we saw happen last term under the CLP. That is not what we will do.

We are getting these decisions right in order to deliver jobs and returns on what we spend our money on for Territorians—priorities we identified going into the election campaign, strategic investment projects that spread government contracts across a greater range of industries to create jobs in the Northern Territory for the economy and for Territorians. It is critical.

One of the other weaknesses of the CLP's policy decisions during the last term was population loss, or net interstate migration, and the reliance on the natural birth rate in the NT. The CLP made a decision to remove help for first home buyers in the existing housing market, which had a massive impact on our first home owner rates—down by over 30%.

We cannot afford to lose Territorians to down south. People are a huge resource for us. We need to keep them here. We need to make it easier for them to get into their own house, own their own piece of the Territory and call that piece of the Territory home. This is as important to us economically as it is socially. We cannot afford to lose these people from our community; we want them working for us in the NT. Alice Springs was hard hit by those changes, along with other places outside Darwin and Palmerston that did not have access to new properties. It hurt the Territory.

We have made significant change with an extra \$24 000 for eligible first home buyers, plus \$10 000 in home renovation packages for Territorians making the commitment to stay in the Territory and buy their first place in the Territory. It is a critical investment and consistent policy approach.

We asked how we could have a stimulus project tied to delivering our policy outcome, and we achieved it with the first home buyer assistance. We get more people staying here and we stimulate the economy at the same time through the \$10 000 tradie scheme with the first home buyer package and the home renovation package. They were important parts in making sure we keep Territorians here. That was also done in the first week after the election. We were on the job in that first week, making sure we make the changes for Territorians to keep them here, which is something we are passionate about.

One of the big things on the horizon as part of that post-INPEX construction phase is Defence investment. I spent a lot of time in opposition talking to those at the Master Builders Association, the Territory Construction Association, about the work it has done to present to Defence about the capacity and capability of the NT to deliver on those big projects. I commend the work the private sector has done in that space to make the case for the NT to be able to deliver those projects locally.

I picked those projects up in government. I met with Brigadier Tim Bayliss the other day to ensure our government is doing all it can to secure local participation in the \$20bn Defence infrastructure program. We have to work with the feds on how they align their developing the north strategy with the *2016 Defence White Paper* and *Closing the Gap*, three very important Commonwealth strategies for the Northern Territory, and the more they align the better the Territory will be on all three grounds.

I am very keen to work with the Commonwealth. I have already met with Minister Matt Canavan, the Prime Minister and the brigadier, and I will keep meeting with Defence. We have to keep working and delivering on this for Territorians. I believe this needs to be a bipartisan pursuit, and this is the best way to deliver these returns for the Territory. The Territory presents a bipartisan face.

I commend any efforts made by the CLP and the Independents to make sure we get the best return for Territorians out of those three crucial federal government strategies. So much of the work we do in this place, especially when it comes to jobs, is about making sure there are smooth baton changes from one government to the other and that we have bipartisan relationships in Canberra no matter who is in government—currently a Liberal government.

We must always make sure, being a small jurisdiction of massive challenges, that we always have a positive face towards Canberra and work together with Canberra. We will get those results if we keep up those positive relationships with the Prime Minister, Minister Canavan, Minister Payne and the other ministers, and I take personal responsibility, as the Chief Minister, to get that return.

Another example of the importance of a smooth baton change is our relationship with international friends and trading partners. We have seen, over the years, from the CLP government's Perron and Stone through to Clare Martin and Paul Henderson as Labor Chief Ministers, and even through to the early days of Chief Minister Mills—there was some trouble in Japan under Chief Minister Giles, but he and the CLP made some good inroads into China during the last term.

By and large there is a smooth transition and we build on each other's efforts with our international neighbours. I took it upon myself early in this term to make sure we repaired that relationship with Japan and that we build on our relationship with Korea and growing our relationship with China. It is a very important part of chasing major projects for the Northern Territory.

Some big things were discussed over there. We need to make sure that in the big boardrooms in overseas countries people can think about the Territory and know they can do business here, that it is a safe place to do business, that we have a good, strong regulatory environment that is robust, and that they know what the rules are. I think we can do that. The experience I had in Japan paid very strong tribute to the work of Chief Minister Paul Henderson and Chief Minister Clare Martin. We have strong relationships there.

While I was in Japan we signed an extension with INPEX on the optional development lease at Blaydin Point for future trains five and six. The future for the Territory remains bright when it comes to offshore oil and gas. It really will be an important area for us, a growing area. Very soon we will enter into the operational phases for INPEX and Shell Prelude, another project, which will all be serviced out of the Darwin Marine Supply Base.

This is where the ongoing, sustainable jobs from these projects will be available. INPEX will be around for 40-plus years; it engineered its plant and vessels for around the 40-year mark. That is a sign of confidence and investment in the NT. We will keep working with INPEX.

Just the other day local businesses such as RAMS and INPEX, with the Member for Port Darwin, signed the local plan, which is very important—jobs for locals. INPEX has recommitted and reaffirmed, under this government, its commitment to locals. That is very important going into the operational phase. In South Korea, at the port of Geoje shipbuilding plants, I got to meet with the operational teams for Ichthys and Shell Prelude, and we talked about how we will service them out of Darwin. This is a very exciting area for us.

During my trips to Japan, South Korea and China I discussed the future for offshore oil and gas, including other areas in those waters, and our capacity to service and the world-class projects that are under way here. It always remains very exciting off our shores; there are many companies we can work with in that space.

I have confidence in the future of the Northern Territory and am very excited about it. Things were live and well in Rizhao, with the almost 100-strong delegation we led there. There were some very positive interactions between Territory businesses and China businesses, and between NT department officials and Chinese government officials. We saw the Halikos arrangement there, with the exchange of staff between operations in Darwin and Landbridge's operations in China, which helped us to be China-ready. Other exciting things are being discussed from those meetings as well, which I think will bear fruit soon. It was a very exciting couple of days in Rizhao.

We will have a return delegation in the NT and we will get to build on those conversations. That trip will be organised for next year. I think there will be a very strong relationship between the Territory and Rizhao, and we will do something similar in Japan. I will have a conversation with INPEX about how we can build on our relationship with INPEX. That opportunity was lost over the last four years. It is something Chief Minister Mills would have pursued. We lost that opportunity through CLP infighting and the way it handled business over the last four years. We could have the same relationship with INPEX as we do with Rizhao and Landbridge, so I will pursue that.

The forum in Rizhao was exciting; it is an example of how good governments transition, pick up the baton and run with it to make sure we build on those successes. The Darwin port has been sold—Landbridge is the new owner—and I now have a responsibility as Chief Minister to get the best return for Territorians, and I will do that.

We are working on major projects with private investors, including Project Sea Dragon, a very exciting project. These projects must be handled during the transition from one government to the next. Project Sea Dragon is of a large scale, which you need for export to big markets like China. It is a huge project—with those delicious looking prawns—and it is exciting. There are many moving parts around that project. We are working with the company on behalf of government to get it through the process. It must comply with all the robust regulations that are in place. It will be a very exciting business.

The Member for Spillett spoke earlier about barramundi and mentioned the Richards family. They have some great barra. The mighty barramundi is loved in Japan, Korea and China. I have learned from my conversations with Dan that it is loved in many other places. We need to work with the Richards family, and other people who want to market barramundi in the Territory, to get to that export-scale quantity that is needed for places like China. The hunger for barra is exciting, but they are also hungry for our beef and soy beans. I had a very good conversation in Japan regarding soy beans. I even got to eat some soy cheese. I am very excited about the potential for soy, which is something we are working on with the Japanese government.

During our summit conversations the Japanese government raised the topic of infrastructure deficits in the Northern Territory. The lack of a long-term plan means they cannot have confidence in the Northern Territory. The plan is missing. The very thing we want to do will be done through the summit process that we are delivering. The ministry was very excited to hear about that. It is exactly what they want to see and we will deliver it. They can see the Developing the North agenda leading up to that, which is why they have confidence in that federal government strategy. They can see how it lines up with their strategies, like the mate of Japan policy—but we have to deliver on it through the summit process and through the infrastructure plan of our first budget. They want to see it and hear about it, and we are delivering it through consultation with the sectors and foreign governments, which is a very positive development. That is the language they want to hear and the action they want to see.

There are other projects we are carrying out. As the Member for Spillett mentioned, they were commenced under the CLP, but they have also been spoken about in previous Labor administrations. The Territory is a small place; there are only so many major projects. You have to believe in those projects and watch them

go from one government to the next. The Tennant Creek to Mount Isa railway line is a good example of that. It has been talked about for a long time. Government will make it happen, and I like to think it will be my government.

I talk about the Tennant Creek to Mount Isa railway line in a manner of sequence—to make it a reality, it is about what you do and the order in which you do it. What kind of roads, spur lines, cold storage and private sector investment in agribusiness do we need in order to make it a reality so it stacks up. We must have the right conversation about the sequence of things that we need in order to make the railway line work. When you discuss this across sectors and go through a summit process, you can understand what we need from the public sector to unlock the private sector, and the order in which it needs to be done. That is what we are looking for.

We are seeing confidence from Genesee and Wyoming and from Landbridge. I believe we will see investment in cold storage through Landbridge park, which will be developed at East Arm. We will see some exciting investments, so let us get the conversation started about sequencing to make sure we get the major projects under way.

Another example of a major project we are running with, which was introduced under the previous government, is the Northern Gas Pipeline. That will receive full attention from this government to make sure it is a reality and that it runs on time. I met with Jemena as well as its major shareholder in China, State Grid. We will have the right conversations with the right people to keep backing that project and making sure it is delivered. That is the responsible thing to do when you transition from one government to the next.

The Darwin luxury hotel development was proposed by the CLP. It has not started yet, but we will make sure we keep working with Landbridge to make sure it is delivered and that we get the best possible return for Territorians—the very responsible transition from one government to the next.

One day I will not be Chief Minister. It might be someone from my team or someone from the cross bench. I really want to see a smooth transition from this government to the next. It is what you have to deliver.

Mr Wood: Don't go to Japan any more. Try another company.

Mr GUNNER: Bucket list, Gerry—I went to Japan and I came back. I am very happy to tick that box—job done. We defeated the jinx so now anyone can go to Japan. It is fine.

At a small business level we have created the Small Business Champions team, an idea that came from businesses on the ground when we were in opposition. It is about advocacy and how we can work, as a department, with them to help them through the difficulties that can exist within government. Who better to help you through government than government? No matter how much you try to make it as simple as possible—we also know how precious time is, and the Small Business Champions will help small businesses when it comes to the issues of government and timing, and we support them. That is a good thing and I am looking forward to it.

We listen to Territorians and we will deliver the Territory's economic summits. They are not the handbrake the Member for Spillett referred to them as. This is a thorough process to go into our first budget in 2017-18. It is a very responsible thing to do and people were asking for that during the last term of government. They did not want a government that only had thought bubbles and made things up in a room without talking to people. We saw myriad examples of that during the last term.

I want to see a thorough process being followed across sectors that leads to a coherent, long-term plan we can all buy into and believe in, something that will survive transitions of government down the line to make sure we have a body of work that unlocks private sector investment with confidence going forward. That is what we want to deliver, and there is a lot of pressure because we have not delivered it before.

I am working hard with my Cabinet colleagues and my department. I thank the public servants who are doing a lot of work on those summits and this process, making sure we deliver the infrastructure and economic strategies for the Northern Territory. I hope we do it from our first budget onwards in a way that is not seen as, 'Only Labor can buy into this, own this and have this infrastructure plan'.

Things like the Tennant Creek to Mount Isa railway are not something that any government or political party should put their badge on and say, 'It is mine alone'. These projects are important for the Territory; they happen over many years and they need all parties to buy into and believe in them.

The Territory is a very big land mass, but a small jurisdiction when it comes to our people. We need to ensure investment in these projects. There are only so many major projects in the Territory, when you think about it. We have to make sure they go from one government to the next and that there is a smooth transition. We need an infrastructure plan that survives transition and goes for 10, 15 or 20 years. We are working on a 10-year infrastructure plan of rolling projects; that is how I see it. It is important for us to deliver it in a way that restores certainty and confidence in the Northern Territory.

I thank the Member for Spillett for bringing this motion to the House so I could talk about the importance of business and jobs in the Northern Territory. It is something we believe in, and this was a good opportunity to discuss it again.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not support this motion. I sat in a previous government which, in many cases, destroyed local business. You only had to talk to the many who struggled under some of the large contracts the previous government handed out. Tiger Brennan Drive is an example. How many genuine Northern Territory businesses worked on that program?

I spoke in this parliament about the local steel suppliers that were struggling because of the lack of work in the Northern Territory. I heard that from many people, time and again. I spoke last night about a local company that tendered for some work—the minister probably knows a bit about it. If we want to support local businesses we need to look in depth at whether supporting local business also means supporting companies that have a good track record, that have been in the Territory for a long time and have a good relationship with the people they work for.

Ms Julie Hobbs, Director of DT Hobbs Pty Ltd, lost two contracts that were changed at the last minute. I do not know if that was the major issue with the contracts, but they applied for a job on 19 October. Ms Hobbs said, 'On 24 October we received an email advising we had an insufficient CAL rating and we had 14 days to obtain an upgraded rating sufficient to meet our tender price. I applied for an increased CAL rating on the same day, and CAL approved our increase from \$4m to \$6.5m on 25 October. Contract and Procurement Services were notified of the increase on the day of the approval. Yesterday afternoon we received an email to advise we had not been identified as short-listed tenderer.'

What was the point? If they knew they would not get it, why did they make them go down that path?

She said that when they went for a debrief in relation to the five-by-three-bedroom homes in Wurrumiyanga, 'It was a frustration for me. I went there with our estimator and the Tiwi Enterprises representative, and it raised so many more questions. Even though we got to voice some of our concerns, we all left the meeting knowing it will be business as usual at DoI. I advised at the meeting that we were not happy with the result, that we believed we were the best offer, taking into account our local content, that we already have a presence in the region since 2013, and the support of the Tiwi Islanders and an MOU with Tiwi Enterprises. We are committed to continuity of employment and providing new training opportunities to the Tiwi Islanders.

'We had already secured accommodation and other facilities. Tiwi Enterprises also voiced their concern that every time a new contractor is sent into the community they lose traction with their employment, training and business objectives and have to start all over again. Tiwi Enterprises also commented that they have not been contacted in relation to accommodation, laydown area, site office facilities, employment and training, contracting et cetera by the successful contractor. This happened after the contract was awarded. From the debrief I gather that tenderers can put anything in their submissions to win the work, that is, community preferences are not considered, local presence is not considered and quality of previous work is not considered.

'These factors are not relevant to the tender assessors. Past performance only accounts for 10% of the total score. I do not think this is acceptable for remote area projects. Imagine if we ran our business on this basis. What I still cannot and will not accept is that the livelihood and continued employment of 50-plus locals, DT Hobbs, Tiwi Enterprises and subcontracted suppliers can be determined by an assessment panel—three in this case—who demonstrated they have little understanding of, or are not properly qualified to assess, local content. The assessment did not appear to take into account or consider any of the factors of working remote—the logistics, the hardships, length of time it takes to develop relationships and gain the trust of Indigenous people, and the cost of establishing and operating a business in the region.

'There was no acknowledgement of what it takes to develop meaningful and sustainable employment and training outcomes for locals at the community level. There are many simple checks that could be examined at this phase instead of at the end of the job.'

'It was mentioned during the meeting there is plenty of work coming out in the new year, and we may have to look at working out the locations.'

The comment was, 'Seriously?'

When we talk about supporting local business it sometimes reflects the frustration of some of our local companies. They work hard and create relationships. I know, from working in remote communities, there is nothing better than to have a business in operation that has the confidence of the people who work there. That relationship means you achieve good employment outcomes for the company and the locals. If you start playing around with that too much you end up with, as Tiwi Enterprises said, a discontinuity of the workforce. In this case, the company will probably lay off workers before Christmas, which is the worst thing that can happen.

Whilst I am very critical of the previous government, if the new government wants to keep local businesses it must add in a slight flavour which I call the social impact of changing a contract. If someone has to pack up and go—I know the contract price is important, but if a company has not followed due diligence and not negotiated, as it should, for accommodation or a lease on land to put housing there, you have to wonder whether the tender process is thorough enough. I am concerned that this company, which has a good track record and has worked many years in the Territory, is now in dire straits when it comes to losing that contract.

The Chief Minister spoke about creating jobs. I should comment on the Tennant Creek to Mount Isa railway. I would love someone to tell me how that will work. The standard gauge and the narrow gauge do not mix unless you want to repeat Albury-Wodonga. We got past that stage of life. I will not support a railway line to Mount Isa until I find out what the people of Queensland will do. I understand the people of Townsville are not very happy about having an upgraded line going to the Northern Territory because it might compete with their port. I think there needs to be more discussion about the feasibility of that project.

The Chief Minister also mentioned the Jemena pipeline. The company has promised 50% local jobs. One of the questions I want to ask the minister is how he will make sure that happens. Is there an agreement with the previous government that guarantees at least 50% of the jobs will be local? And what do they mean by local? As much as I agree with the pipeline, it is no good having pipelines if there are no benefits. With regard to INPEX I wonder if we need to rethink the way these big projects work. Do they help the Territory? The only thing we got for the Territory from a government point of view is stamp duty and registration fees. You do not get much else from INPEX. I asked the previous government about that.

Should we be saying to companies that want to come along, 'No, you do not build an INPEX village; you build a suburb. Then that suburb is there for the community.' The INPEX village is not a suburb; it is a pile of single people's houses. I do not know what the future of that place will be. If we want big projects and to achieve an outcome that will last longer than the project—a lasting legacy—we need to start looking away from workers' camps and toward building a suburb that the company hands back to the government when it has finished.

We could start to look outside the square. One of the reasons we are building a pipeline is that we have too much gas, but we do not have a manufacturing industry. Years ago we could not have a manufacturing industry because we did not have cheap energy. Now we have all this gas we cannot use. Are there opportunities for us to start manufacturing in the Northern Territory?

Gas is energy. If the price of gas is right can we bring in materials from within Australia and from overseas? Can we create a manufacturing industry of some kind in the Northern Territory? I do not know, but one of the main reasons provided to me for not having a manufacturing industry in the Northern Territory was simply that we did not have enough gas. We have plenty of gas coming in from Eni that we do not use.

I could ask what will happen to the local businesses at Jabiru. I think the Jabiru situation, its future, needs to be discussed. Quite a few businesses there would probably like to know what their future is. They employ local people, but as you can see already, with the bakery closing down, the future looks a bit grim. It would be good to know if the government is looking at making sure Jabiru has a future where people are still employed and where businesses can continue. It would be interesting to know the government's view

on that. Government members have been there recently to discuss this issues. A report on Jabiru would be great.

There were a couple of deferments in relation to national parks. We have to make our national parks more attractive, and we can do that in a way that does not affect the environment. When I was in Canada I visited the national park north of Vancouver. It had zip lines going across some of the valleys. They do not destroy the landscape—they are passive—but, by gee, they give people a thrill. You are strapped into a harness and going across a valley.

A few years ago I would have said never to touch a national park, but people are looking for things that will attract them to those parks, a bit of adventure. There is supposed to be a rope walk among the trees at Howard Springs. I am not sure when that will happen, but it was put forward by the previous minister for conservation. It went to the planning authority, but I do not know what happened to the plans. That is a way of creating jobs; you attract more tourists and you create more jobs through the people operating these schemes.

I have said this before: we need retirement villages in the rural area. Release some land and ask for expressions of interest. I would love a rural retirement village. With the ageing population you will not have a problem filling a retirement village. If we do not have those facilities people will move south, as they already have. That is another area we can create jobs in.

Mining is one of our biggest contributors to the economy in the Territory. It is one of the few industries, along with tourism and agriculture, that is not reliant on the GST. Defence is reliant on federal government money. A lot of work in Darwin is reliant on federal money, but mining is not, nor is agriculture or tourism.

I have just been to Roma and looked at the prospects of coal seam gas. The issues raised with me were less about the environment and more about the economy. Places like Roma and the Darling Downs have some of the lowest unemployment in Queensland. I was told Roma has an unemployment rate of 1.8%, of which 1.4% are people who do not want to work in the first place, so it is about 0.4%. That is not necessarily an argument about the good or the bad side of the gas industry. We need to create an economy that is not based on GST or federal government funding; otherwise, it is pretty pointless.

I can see that the Member for Blain wants to say a few words, so I will finish there. I cannot support this because I do not believe the previous government did much for local businesses. That is the feedback from local businesses. They are looking for something different with this government. Hopefully that summit, which I hope happens quickly, will do something to make that change.

Mr MILLS (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Nelson for his contribution. I honestly believe this is a state of urgency for us to respond to. I will not reflect on whether this can be supported or not on the basis of the previous administration's behaviour. But, nonetheless, this needs to be a matter taken quite seriously by government.

As you would all know, I have returned to the parliament from spending time outside of Australia, looking at Australia and the Northern Territory from another perspective, from a region we talk a lot about. Having recently attended the Australia Indonesia Business Council conference in Perth, and being a member of the Australia Indonesia Business Council in the Northern Territory as well as the International Business Council—we have to recognise that we need to lift our game and work exceptionally hard and with great energy in the region. It is happening whether we attend to it or not, and we could easily be left behind.

The issue of economic opportunities should not be a singular focus in major projects. They are very important, but the opportunities for a very small jurisdiction like the Northern Territory—believe me, it is small—unless we are smart, work hard and understand how it works in our region, will become irrelevant. We need to know people and how the market operates. We need to know the sophistication and nuances of the market and the people who make decisions in the immediate region. I do not say that in a general sense.

In the Chief Minister's opening statement to this parliament I noticed a reference to the big idea of engaging India or China in the first instance, and there was not much reference to Indonesia or ASEAN. For the Northern Territory it has to be a much finer focus on specific regions and people who are endeavouring to solve problems in our region and how we can partner with them.

It will not happen by accident or because we think we have it all and they will simply come when they are told to. It is the other way round. That is the increasingly clear message that is coming from forums like the

one held in Perth last week. The effort needs to be made from this side. Our region is more focused northwards—apart from the basic resources. In terms of economic opportunities, service provision, education, manufacturing and so on they naturally tend to look north and not south. We happen to be looking north. We talk a lot about northern development, but we do not know as much as we ought about the northern view of this southern story. What is the market thinking? What does it understand about us and what we have to offer? Are we a reliable, knowledgeable partner that can understand the culture and the environment of our immediate region?

The message I will give from time to time focuses on the need to operate as though we are coming from behind, and to work hard and be less interested in spending our energy on what happened with the CLP government, the ALP government before that or this new government. I think it is time to wake up and get a move on.

There are some big changes going on in our region. With the election of Trump, the US President-elect, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, is likely to go, which will affect Australia. That is an opportunity for us because there is a comprehensive economic partnership is under negotiation and coming to the closing stages between Australia and Indonesia. It is a unique partnership being considered on the basis of how we could partner in a strategic way to service second markets—that is, the partnership between Australia and Indonesia—in a smart way, with resources and services from Australia partnered with the labour force and capacity in Indonesia to market to a third country. There are some pretty exciting stories taking place around Western Australia and South Australia.

Debate suspended.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms FYLES (Leader of Government Business): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms WAKEFIELD (Braitling): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to speak about White Ribbon Day. I acknowledge the families who have lost family members to violence. We have far too many of those families in the Northern Territory. I also thank the men who have worked tirelessly to stand up against violence against women and take a public position on violence. Violence against women can be very difficult and challenging to talk about.

I acknowledge long-term White Ribbon Ambassadors in Alice Springs, Mayor Damien Ryan and Russell Goldflam. They have both stood up and publicly shown their support for this cause. I thank them for their commitment.

The White Ribbon movement is a long-term campaign led by men. Originally it was started by a group of men who were horrified at the massacre of 14 female students in a university by a fellow student who deliberately shot all the female students in the lecture theatre. They decided they needed a platform to speak out and stop male violence against women. Since then it has become a worldwide campaign. I think it is remarkable that it has taken residence in the Northern Territory, even quite remote parts of the Northern Territory, because we are a long way from a Canadian university.

For me, this shows a couple of things. There are many good men who want to publicly stand up and be seen as abhorring violence against women. I acknowledge that my parliamentary colleagues took a photo in Government House yesterday, commemorating White Ribbon Day. I thank you for your support of this issue.

I think it also shows the power of grassroots campaigns to spread around the world. This is a campaign that was started by a handful of men and it is now an international, well-supported campaign. We have seen the start of a powerful campaign right here in the Territory with Charlie King's No More campaign. It shows you that when someone decides to stand up and make a difference they can. That campaign is starting to get national traction, which shows people's willingness to participate in a range of ways. It also shows the power of persistence. I was at some meetings very early on, where Charlie was talking about domestic and family violence. That was close to 10 years ago. Since then the program has come a long way.

I stand up today to thank all the men who are prepared to stand up and be counted on this issue. The only way we will overcome this problem is if we work together respectfully, persistently and with the sense of urgency that we must have toward the size, scope and severity of this problem in the Northern Territory. I

look forward to working with you all in this term of parliament to reduce the rates of domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory.

Ms LAWLER (Drysdale): Mr Deputy Speaker, I was honoured to represent the Chief Minister at the 10th anniversary of the Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in the Public Sector on 4 November 2016. The awards acknowledge and celebrate the exceptional talents within our public sector. Much of the work of government agencies does not get the credit it deserves. We have talented people in the field, in offices, schools, fire stations and police stations every day, developing initiatives and projects to make the Northern Territory a better place in serving the needs of Territorians. The initiatives, projects and programs may be known to the public; however, the hard work, long hours and dedication of the individuals who develop and deliver them is not often understood.

Having worked in the public service for over 33 years, I know public servants are, by far, some of the hardest-working, creative, innovative individuals in the Territory. They are committed to developing the Northern Territory and providing quality services to the community in which they live.

The awards, which were attended by over 500 people, who were celebrating and thoroughly enjoying themselves on the night, recognised a range of winners across a number of categories. I will go through those now to acknowledge them and make sure they are on the public record.

In the Developing Northern Australia category the joint winners were Boosting Business in the Bush and the Northern Gas Pipeline, which are both run by the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation. I think the Department of Trade, Business and Innovation won many awards on the night. They got a lot of handshakes, that is for sure. They were up and down all night.

Making the NT a Better Place to Live—Legacy Mines, Department of Primary Industry and Resources.

Delivering Quality Customer Services—New Tenancy Agreement Support Resource, Department of Housing and Community Development.

Strengthening Government and Public Administration—Development and Implementation of the Policy Guideline Centre, Department of Health.

Excellence in Partnering—Community Based Childcare Support Program, Department of Trade, Business and Innovation.

Strengthening the Economy and Making the NT a Better Place to do Business—the Business of Doing Business, Business Development Officers, Department of Trade, Business and Innovation.

Innovation in the Public Sector—the joint winners were Patient Assistance Travel Scheme Telehealth Project, Department of Health; and ASNEX Technology Innovation for Managing Government's Infrastructure Assets, Department of Corporate and Information Services.

Improving Indigenous Employment Outcomes—Delivering Indigenous Employment Outcomes, Department of Corporate and Information Services.

The winning project teams shared a prize pool, donated by the private sector. It was nice on the night to be able to thank the private sector companies that sponsored the awards. Most of the awards had \$20 000 worth of professional development for the teams to share, so it was well worth winning.

All finalists for the Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in the Public Sector deserve congratulations on the calibre of their entries and their commitment to their work. I had a number of conversations with sponsors and other people on the night, who said they were not necessarily aware of the diverse and broad range of projects the public sector is involved in. It was great for people who attended to see how wonderful our public service is.

Public service medals were also awarded on the night. One of the lovely parts of this job is you get to acknowledge outstanding people who have done some amazing things in the Territory.

Nine employees were acknowledged with individual Chief Minister's Public Sector Medals for outstanding service. The Chief Minister's medals form part of the Northern Territory Government's commitment to excellence in the public sector through recognition of individuals who provide an outstanding service for the

betterment of the NT. These prestigious medals are awarded to public service employees at all levels, from office administrators to frontline emergency services personnel.

Chief Minister's medal winners for 2016 were Sally Leigo, Department of Primary Industry and Resources; Lucy Tran-Nguyen, Department of Primary Industry and Resources; Terry Lisson, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment; Keith Saalfeld, Department of Environment and Natural Resources; Janice Diamond, Department of Health; Geoff Horni, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics; and Philip Brown, Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, who received the Chief Minister's medal for Outstanding Indigenous Leadership.

I was also very pleased to see that two long-term Department of Education staff who had previously been colleagues of mine received individual Chief Minister's Public Sector Medals as well. Ken Lehmann is the Infrastructure Operations manager at the Department of Education and has worked in education infrastructure and emergency management for many years. Ken had something to do with most of the infrastructure projects in Education over the last 10 years. He oversees construction programs in schools and the professional management of emergency shelters, a very important job in the Top End. Ken does the important task of leading the department's emergency shelter group, which is largely made up of volunteers, to ensure it is ready and responsive to all hazards, including cyclones. If there is a cyclone, he is the man.

Trevor Read is the Principal of Darwin High School. He was previously a teacher and assistant principal in Alice Springs, and the project coordinator for departmental initiatives to increase student voices in decision-making. Trevor is an inspirational leader who is respected by students, teachers and the wider education community. His commitment to ensuring Darwin High School students achieve beyond their own expectations is reflected in the outstanding completion rates and results of students. Trevor also continues to be an excellent educator in the classroom.

The Principal of Darwin High School, which is one of our largest schools, still makes the time to be a classroom teacher as well. For a number of years at Darwin High School Trevor has continued to teach the Community Studies course to Stage 2 students, which are mainly Year 12 students. Many of these students come into Trevor's classroom when they need support if they feel like giving up on their final year of study. How wonderful it is for the principal to be teaching Community Studies. Trevor goes above and beyond to support students to realise their potential and see their studies through to completion. His passion and commitment to educating young people is to be commended.

Every one of our public service employees plays a role in creating a better Territory, be it the strategic policy thinkers, administrative assistants, health workers in remote clinics or teachers in classrooms delivering quality education to our students. Our government needs each and every one of them to be able to deliver every day.

Since being elected to government only a short time ago, my colleagues and I have been so impressed by the level of professionalism and commitment we have seen in the public sector. When there is a new government and you are in the public sector it can be difficult because there are changes to the machinery of government and big changes in the workplace. To see the professionalism of the public service as it continues to deliver every day has been amazing. I commend public sector employees for the seamlessness in their support for the changes of government.

We have every confidence the public sector can deliver on this government's agenda, which is focused on building trust, putting children at the centre of our decisions, and jobs for Territorians. Congratulations to the finalists and winners recognised at the 2016 Chief Minister's Awards for Excellence in the Public Sector.

Mr McCARTHY (Barkly): Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to inform the House of my recent time spent with the Department of Housing and Community Development's Public Housing Safety Officers.

The senior adviser and I were fortunate enough to accompany these officers on a late Friday night patrol. The patrol took place on 29 October this year from 9 pm to 12.30 am. I wanted to experience and witness firsthand the operations and challenges the Public Housing Safety Officers face during their patrols. I was extremely impressed.

Public Housing Safety Officers are critical to managing relationships within public housing tenancies and maintaining safety in our community. They are part of the broader Public Housing Safety Strategy that

includes the red card and visitor management policies, acceptable behaviour agreements and cross-agency collaboration with NT Police.

For those in the House who are unaware, Public Housing Safety Officers are deployed as a first line of response to investigate and respond to antisocial behaviour in and around public housing premises. Officers exercise their legislative powers to intervene and reduce antisocial behaviour that occurs on public housing premises. They also have the ability to respond to inappropriate behaviour caused by visitors which impacts on tenants and the broader community.

As part of the patrol we travelled throughout the Darwin and Palmerston regions. This involved visiting public housing properties at John Stokes Square and Litchfield Court in Nightcliff; the Tomaris complex in the CBD; Fawcett Court in Malak; the Anglicare-managed Garraworra complex on Crerar Road in Berrimah; Cornwallis Circuit and Victoria Drive in Gray; Davoren Circuit in Moulden; and Tabletop Place in Malak.

I was impressed by the professional way the Public Housing Safety Officers went about their business. Their ability to engage with members of the public was second to none. The Public Housing Safety Officers who took me on patrol knew most of the people we spoke with in the housing complexes. Not only did they know them by sight, they had developed strong working relationships with them, were on a first name basis and commanded respect.

I witnessed firsthand how respectful and professional the officers I accompanied were while on patrol. They calmed situations down through their positive relationships with the people. I am sure this is the culture that is fostered and adopted among all Public Housing Safety Officers.

I was also impressed to hear of the ongoing collaborative arrangements between the Northern Territory Police and the Public Housing Safety Officers. I am informed that there are local working groups in operation where police, Public Housing Safety Officers and tenancy management officers get together and discuss public housing issues and identify hotspots. Collaboration between police and housing officers at the local level is essential to addressing antisocial behaviour in the Northern Territory.

In addition to their role of combatting antisocial behaviour, Public Housing Safety Officers are also able to undertake assessments of public housing properties and make recommendations to improve safety. This includes the reduction and removal of vegetation, improved lighting and better fencing.

I personally thank Liam, Matt, Daniel, Duc and Jon for the time they spent with me and the senior adviser on that Friday night, and Deputy Chief Executive Jim Bamber for organising the patrols and accompanying us.

Public housing safety is a tough job. It is hard and challenging work—going out, often late at night, diffusing situations where people can be difficult to deal with. I cannot speak highly enough of the great work undertaken by the Public Housing Safety Officers for our community. It is important to note that this initiative, fostered by Minister Burns, the previous Member for Johnston, coincided with the development of the public transit safety officers, who do similar work on our public transport networks—how important they are and how these programs deliver the real outcomes in community safety.

It was a great night, an opportunity to learn. It was also an opportunity to learn firsthand about the urban public housing stock and the challenges we have. The night had elements of everything, including contact with police over radio. I warned the Public Housing Safety Officer team that I could bump into a constituent from Tennant Creek. It happened in the Tomaris complex late at night. It was great to see William, who was happily coming home after a night out to visit his mother. He was in Darwin for training as part of his professional development with the organisation he works with in Tennant Creek. That was a memorable occasion.

The last event of the night, getting close to midnight, was a very interesting one. I have been known to engage in a number of skirmishes in my time, particularly as a younger person, so I had a take on what was happening on the street and I was assessing the situation as an individual. The last event we attended was a family which needed support. It was a house in the suburbs of Palmerston and a lot of people had arrived at that residence. There were obviously kinship relationships which were, culturally, sensitive to handle. The situation had escalated to where there would be trouble and serious safety risks for both parties. Implements in the vicinity had been brandished.

Attending that situation, it was amazing to see these officers engage on the ground. One of the first things I noticed was the respect that was commanded and their ability to defuse a situation by completely reducing the dialogue, making sure people were moved to safe spaces. The people who were not supposed to be there were moving on, and the family then felt secure with the support of these officers, making sure it came under control. It had obviously been reported to neighbours. As I worked the environment scan I picked up on the neighbours who were watching this, including the ones who had reported the incident. Everybody was made safe.

I took great delight in seeing the acknowledgement of the family. These guys had entered a very complex situation and had to operate within a lot of cultural protocols. The family showed their appreciation and asked the Public Housing Safety Officers to secure their yard. As they secured the yard and everybody left amicably the officers made sure people were safe, secure and moved on. The residents of the house went inside and then the lights went off and everything was safe.

Back in the vehicles the officers reported this incident back to the police and, upon reporting that incident, they were called to look at another area to make sure people were safe. It was an incredible education and a privilege to be able to go out with them and understand the nature of the job. What a great program it is.

We have a lot of calls for this. In Tennant Creek I remember working with the senior citizens on some issues and we had Public Housing Safety Officers from Alice Springs come up. They spent four days in Tennant Creek, did some incredible work and defused all the situations that had emerged.

The Public Housing Safety Officer teams also work in Katherine. They travel down from Darwin and support the community there. It is a great program with great people and it should not be underestimated. It is a frontline service. It is not easy work; it is extremely challenging work and I cannot imagine how we would do without them. The program has been set up and supported, and it is delivering great outcomes.

I commend our Public Housing Safety Officers to members of this House.

Mr GUYULA (Nhulunbuy): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to speak on existing sovereign rights and Madayin law, Northern Land Council consultation practice, the Gunyangara 99-year lease and Gove Peninsula land ownership.

It is well known that I am an advocate for a treaty between Australian powers and my Yolngu nations, which makes up the majority of the Nhulunbuy electorate. A treaty, to me, means real law-based recognition from Australian governments for my people's sovereignty—the right to control our land and the right to govern for ourselves.

Indigenous people in the Northern Territory have already had success in receiving recognition of sovereignty from the colonial powers. This was achieved through the federal parliament's Northern Territory Land Rights Act of 1976. This act protects our right to land ownership and self-governance of the land. For example, determination of land ownership and consultation towards land use agreements are a decision by traditional law; in our language this is called Madayin.

Madayin law is a complete system of law. Central to this system is the Ngarra institution. It is our institution of nationhood. Many now consider Ngarra to be analogous to a parliament. For example, one way or another, all senior governing leaders have their authority confirmed here or decided from this space.

I have received the title of Djirrikay, judge, from this institution and am confirmed as a Liya-ngarra'mirr. Women may be acknowledged as Gong-ganmirr. Also the reputation of Djungagaya, managers, both men and women, are proved here. This means when Yolngu society meets to make decisions our approach is conciliatory, aiming for general consent amongst the group, but with seniority taking effect. If we cannot make a decision all together in the citizens forum, called Garma, we might withdraw to the forum of elders, called Dhuni. If they cannot make a decision in Dhuni, the Ngarra authorities might need to meet separately to break the impasse.

Sometimes, according to our philosophy, we might just leave it until an answer develops and everyone is satisfied and in harmony. No decision can happen in absence of the consent of Ngarra authorities.

Another important element of the Madayin law is our groupings. We divide ourselves into Bapurru, or clans, Ringgitj, or alliances, and the moieties of Dhuwa and Yirritja. Our citizenship to these groupings is inherited through our fathers. The only exception to this rule is that when a clan's male line fails it converts its inheritance through the mother's line, the Gutharra, before reverting to the father's line again. All these

groupings have associated rights to land. Bapurru, clans, are the primary land ownership jurisdiction, with each clan bequeathed an estate from the beginning. They also have the right to open the Ngarra institution. The Ringgitj, alliances, also have rights to land use along tracks between estates, and over small plots within estates.

On another level the whole of Yolngu land is divided between Dhuwa and Yirritja. These groupings also claim jurisdiction over their citizens. For example, criminal behaviour is regulated with regard to these groupings.

I am a clear supporter of the Land Rights Act. It is moderate respect of the Yolngu Nations sovereignty. We do not want to lose it and see it watered down by amendment or practice. A bad amendment to the act is section 19A(3), which concerns 99-year township leases. It means that if the NLC fails to consult properly a 99-year lease cannot be challenged if it is already approved by the trust. One can easily imagine how this clause leaves Indigenous communities open to outside corruption deals procured by friends, not lawful process.

On a practical level, for some years now it has been clear that the government entity established by the act to advocate for our will, the Northern Land Council, is not following its obligations to land rights law. For example, the NLC fails to follow Madayin law when it does not acknowledge the Ngarra institution as a political entity. Instead, the NLC says Ngarra is just religious. Instead, it pretends leadership is somehow otherwise empowered, but cannot explain how. One can imagine the chaos that ensues. Who, for example, makes a meeting authoritative? More, the NLC does not consider Ringgitj, alliances, in their consideration of land ownership. The NLC operates with a lazy approach to traditional Aboriginal ownership, working only with Bapurru clans, and they make their own law entirely when they subdivide ownership into sub-clans.

Yolgnu jurisdictions do not work like that. The basic Yolgnu governance structure is Bapurru, or clan, not family based. Outsiders cannot divide a clan and say they have a land use agreement. The detail is that Ringgitj groups own land rights under Madayin law. According to the Land Rights Act, that makes those Ringgitj, alliance, groups traditional Aboriginal owners. The NLC cannot just ignore this and make up its own terms. However, ignoring is what the NLC has done. According to media reports, the NLC board last week agreed to a 99-year lease at Gungahara. Despite the media proclaiming this deal as some kind of success, it is in fact a case of top to bottom lawlessness.

For starters, the land in question is not Gumatj owned land. If Gumatj do have a claim it is as one clan amongst several.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nhulunbuy, your time has expired, but you are welcome to recommence your adjournment tomorrow.

Mr SIEVERS (Brennan): Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to put on record the winners of the recent NT Anzac Day Schools' Awards, which were recently announced.

The NT Anzac Day Schools' Awards are designed to encourage initiative and creativity in the way schools commemorate Anzac Day, with an emphasis on inventiveness, balanced with tradition. These awards are open to all Australian primary and secondary schools. Entries are judged by panels at the state and territory level initially, with winning entries and nominations forwarded for national judging. As the assistant minister for veteran affairs, I realise the importance of continuing the legacy of the Anzacs and making sure the students of today are aware of the great importance the Anzacs have on our past, and continuing that into the future.

I congratulate Darwin High School for winning the Northern Territory Secondary School award and Rosebery Middle School for being runner-up. My further congratulations to Durack Primary School for winning the Northern Territory Primary School category, with Bakewell Primary School being runner-up.

At Darwin High School a whole Anzac Day assembly was planned, developed and conducted by Year 12 students. The students researched and presented a tribute to the Australian Flying Corps. Participants in the assembly lit candles and delivered biographies to honour the 15 Territorians who died on the Gallipoli peninsula.

Year 7 students at Rosebery Middle School visited Transition to Year 3 students at Rosebery Primary School and read them a number of Anzac stories. A whole-of-school assembly was also held, which included current and ex-serving members, ex-service organisation representatives, Larrakia elders and Rosebery community members.

Students from preschool to Year 6 at Durack Primary School produced illustrations based on their thoughts of what Anzac Day meant to them and what it is like to be part of an Australian Defence Force family. These illustrations were made into a book, which was printed and bound. The school also held another assembly hosted by the Year 6 students.

In order to make Anzac Day more meaningful, students at Bakewell Primary School decided to acknowledge and contribute to Soldier On. Soldier On is a charity that supports those who have served by focusing on their physical and mental health as well as their community and their future. Teachers and students decided they would make badges and sell them, and then donate the funds to Soldier On. During art lessons students created designs that expressed how they can commemorate Anzac Day.

I am very proud that three of the finalists in the Anzac Day awards are Palmerston schools. I must make mention of Bakewell Primary School and Rosebery Middle School, and thank all the students for the amount of work they did for the Anzac Day events. I also thank the teachers and support staff for their contributions to this wonderful event, which enabled our youth to participate in these Anzac Day awards. I am sure this day and event will be remembered and appreciated into the future.

In support of our Anzac history, lest we forget.

Ms AH KIT (Karama): Mr Deputy Speaker, today I acknowledge a wonderful community-focused initiative held in my community, which is the Malak Monthly Community Dinner.

The Malak Monthly Community Dinner is being held on Monday 28 November in the Chambers Crescent Theatre. The dinner is a project of Darwin Community Arts, which is a non-profit organisation that promotes community-based arts and cultural development. Darwin Community Arts began its relocation from Brown's Mart in the Darwin CBD to the Malak shopping centre in 2008. I acknowledge Ms Delia Lawrie, the previous Member for Karama, for her work on this endeavour.

The Malak Monthly Community Dinner is held on the last Monday of every month for the local neighbourhood and for the various communities that Darwin Community Arts works with. Each month a delicious dinner is prepared by volunteers and participants from My Sister's Kitchen, which began as a project of Darwin Community Arts, where women and children from all backgrounds are welcome to participate in arts and cooking activities, as well as share stories, recipes, food skills and experience.

I am pleased to advise that My Sister's Kitchen has since evolved into a social enterprise where participants and volunteers provide catering to communities in Darwin. The purpose of the Malak Monthly Community Dinner is to encourage community cohesion, which is a great focus for all communities. The dinners provide a great opportunity to be an active community member, get to know our neighbours, support our community and enjoy great food and live entertainment in our community.

In order to make the dinners accessible and appealing there is no set fee for attendance. Instead, donations are encouraged and accepted at the door to cover the cost of the event. Organisers also encourage attendees to bring their own utensils, which is a great mechanism to reduce rubbish and waste.

There is an enormous amount of work involved with the monthly dinners, and I thank Darwin Community Arts and My Sister's Kitchen for their ongoing commitment. I have had a wonderful time attending the monthly community dinners this year with my friends and family, and I congratulate everyone on their efforts and thank them for holding this wonderful initiative in my electorate.

If you are near the Chambers Crescent Theatre on Monday night, I strongly encourage you to take the night off cooking and bring your eating utensils to join us at the last Malak Monthly Community Dinner for 2016.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.