

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS – 17 JUNE 2010

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE - Thursday 17 June 2010

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I welcome Mr Vatskalis, and invite you to introduce the officers accompanying you, and if you wish to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Health and Families.

MINISTER VATSKALIS' PORTFOLIOS DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILIES

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I would like to make a brief statement in relation to my portfolios. I would like to introduce senior officers of the Department of Health and Families who are here with me today: Mr Alan Wilson, Acting Chief Executive; Mr Peter Beirne, Chief Operations Officer; Ms Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Acting Executive Director, NT Families and Children; Ms Helen Mason, Acting Executive Director, Acute Care; Ms Jenny Cleary, Executive Director, Health Services; Dr Barbara Paterson, Chief Health Officer and Executive Director, Health Protection; Ms Liz Stackhouse, General Manager, Royal Darwin Hospital; and Ms Vicki Taylor, General Manager, Alice Springs Hospital. As we progress, I will introduce other officers who may be required for specific output group questions.

This government is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all Territorians. We have committed record budgets for the Department of Health and Families, with over \$1bn allocated for the past three years.

I will be taking questions for the general outputs and the whole-of-agency output for the Department of Health and Families, as well as the output areas of

- Northern Territory Families and Children - Family and Parent Support Services; Child Protection Services; Out of Home Care; Youth Services; Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services; and the Children's Commissioner.
- Acute Care - Admitted Patient Services and Non-admitted Patient Services;
- Health and Wellbeing Services - Community Health; Mental Health; Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability;
- Public Health Services - Environment Health; Disease Control; Alcohol and Other Drugs Services; and Health Research.

My colleague, Mr Knight, will take questions on the output group, Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions, as well as issues related to the Office of Youth Affairs. Questions relating to the Office of Women's Policy were directed to minister Malarndirri McCarthy.

The Department of Health and Families output budget increased during the 2009-10 financial year, from \$1.052bn to \$1.121bn, an increase of \$69m, or 6.6%. This increase during this year was predominantly the result of an increase in Australian government funding negotiated by the department. The department is expected to again meet its budget targets for the 2009-10 financial year. I am pleased to announce this government is again delivering a record budget for Health and Families for 2010-11 with \$1.158bn. This represents an additional \$44.6m, or a 6% through Northern Territory government funding to the department. There is currently a slight decrease in funding from the Australian government of 3.7% while new agreements are being finalised.

As noted earlier, in the 2009-10 financial year, the department received significant Australian government funding primarily relating to the *Closing the Gap* in the Northern Territory.

Some outputs within the Health and Wellbeing Services, NT Families and Children, and the Public Health output groups currently show a reduction due to the contraction of Australian government funding from 2009-10 levels. Currently, the department is negotiating with the Australian government to secure agreements on the level of funding to be provided in 2010-11. Significant changes are

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expected to the federal government's funding reforms to the Acute Care and Primary Health Care sectors. We expect we will reach agreement shortly, and these variations will then be incorporated in the department's 2010-11 budget.

Before I highlight some of the key areas of this budget, I would like to reflect on our achievements in 2009-10:

- an additional \$5.9m was approved to establish or expand programs under the government's initiative for Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage;
- \$1.5m to fund a dental blitz, which has been successful in reducing waiting times in Darwin and Palmerston for general dental care. We have brought the list down from 4525 people to 1355 people; and 320 of these patients booked in for treatment. Fewer than 10% of the patients on the list had been waiting for two years;
- implementation of the Nursing Hours per Patient Day staffing system across the Northern Territory hospital network, delivering an additional 95 nurses;
- opening of the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre to provide radiation and oncology services to Northern Territory residents, together with the Barbara James House, which provides accommodation for these patients;
- provided additional funding to provide back-up power generation on the Royal Darwin Hospital - \$43m;
- twenty safe places opened in 15 remote communities, employing 89 local people;
- expanded the Northern Territory-wide Mobile Outreach Service to provide a therapeutic service for children in remote communities who are suffering trauma from any form of child abuse and neglect; and
- expanded the targeted family support services to include Katherine and Darwin.

Budget 2010-11 continues to deliver on *Closing the Gap* initiatives and *A Working Future* by addressing other important health priorities in the community. The NT Families and Children's budget is increased by \$19m and continues this government's commitment to improve services in this important area.

In 2010-11, further service enhancements are planned in the following areas: \$6m to develop the Out of Home Care Service system; a further \$3.9m to expand initiatives under the *Closing the Gap*; and over \$2m for the establishment of an after hours response to youth on the streets in Alice Springs and emergency accommodation services. These initiatives and funding for an additional 76 workers are included within the \$14.6m of new funds committed to improving the Child Protection System.

The Acute Services Output highlights include:

- \$7.26m for the ongoing operation of the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre;
- \$620 000 for additional pathology staff at Royal Darwin Hospital;
- \$1.7m to expand renal services in Tennant Creek and \$2.8m to construct a new renal facility in Katherine;
- \$1.2m to Alice Springs and Royal Darwin Hospitals to continue the implementation of a coordinated

approach to patient care from hospital to community for Indigenous patients treated for preventable chronic disease programs targeting diabetes, kidney failure, and hearing loss.

We have also provided \$2.3m to enhance secure services for young people and adults with complex care needs; \$930 000 to establish a new Territory-wide 24-hour mental health hotline to improve response for mental health clients and families; \$750 000 to maintain the increased dental services; \$200 000 to establish the Office of the Public Guardian; and \$790 000 for improving services following the Disability Services review.

The Public Health Services outputs show an increase of \$649 000 in 2010-11. This modest increase is a reflection of the drop in Australian government funding. Again, it is expected that new funding agreements will soon be negotiated to continue many of these services. \$580 000 will be provided to fund additional Environmental Health Worker positions in the Northern Territory.

I will now be happy to take questions from the committee relating to my current output responsibilities.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions to the opening statement?

Mr WOOD: Clarification on one item. Where does St John Ambulance fit in the categories?

A Witness: It will be under acute care.

Ms ANDERSON: Mr Chairman, just a point of clarification as well for the task force. Where do questions for the child protection task force fit in for the task force?

Mr VATSKALIS: Children's Services.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay.

Agency Specific (Whole-of-Government Related Questions) Budget and Fiscal Strategies

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, we will move on to agency specific whole-of-government related questions, budget and fiscal strategies. Are there any other questions?

Members: No.

**OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - NT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN
Output 1.1 - Family and Parent Support Services**

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now proceed to Output Group 1.0 NT Families and Children, Output 1.1 Family and Parent Support Services.

Ms CARNEY: I do have questions, but I will not ask them because of time constraints.

Mr WOOD: Just a quick one. How many family responsibility agreements does the department have in place?

Ms CARNEY: That is Youth Services, I think you will find.

Output 1.2 – Child Protection Service

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, we proceed to Output 1.2 Child Protection Services.

Ms CARNEY: Good morning minister, everyone. It is nice to see some faces again, and some new faces as well.

Minister, you said in Question Time last week that you would provide me with some answers to some

questions during estimates. After Question Time you gave me a personal assurance that you would provide information to me beforehand. Like your predecessor, you have failed to do so. I will ask, therefore, the questions again.

The abject failure of the child protection system to protect a motherless infant at Royal Darwin Hospital was the catalyst to the establishment of the child protection inquiry. Can you confirm that the infant was placed with a relative despite an active notification and/or investigation by the department into the suitability of that individual to care for the other siblings who were in his care?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, thank you for your question. My administrator will provide the information to you. The difficulty I have with this one is how to save the privacy of the family, but I am happy to provide some information. This was an issue in 2009 and you are aware that a child was placed in a family member's care due to a federal family court order, not a decision by the department, not a cost to Children and Families court order which we cannot breach...But I can say, as a result of the injury to the child, an internal departmental review occurred and has resulted in new policies and processes to strength communication between the hospital and the Northern Territory Family and Children Services, including a child protection position being created within the department.

I understand your interest. I have no problem providing information if I can, if I am allowed, and if I do not breach confidentiality. But my administration person for Children's Services will be providing more information on this particular issue.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Executive Director, NTFC. I am happy to provide information in relation to the department's progress on implementing recommendations as a result of that inquiry if that will assist in responding to the question.

Ms CARNEY: You have pre-empted another question. Yes, I would like to have that information, however, I would like to comment on something the minister said.

You would be aware, minister, if there was a family court order which does not, would not, and did not preclude the department either taking information to the family court, or making an application to the family matters court in respect of that child - I think it is a nonsense for you, and your predecessor, to hide behind the excuse of the child was subject to a family court order. That is, with respect, gutless in the extreme. Would you acknowledge it was an error by the department to release that child into the care of a person in respect of whom there were active notifications and/or an active investigation?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I explained to you before, following this incident the department has reviewed many policies and established new precedents in order to avoid similar situations in the future. Again, and with regard to what I can release and what I cannot release, you know very well, as a lawyer, I am bound by the act, and I am happy to give out information I can. The reason it has not been provided in writing is because I have explored the opportunities to provide you with a private briefing to provide this information.

Ms CARNEY: You said you would get information to me. I remind you that section 282 of the act regarding confidentiality is for the protection of children, not the protection of inept, incompetent government ministers. I am disappointed you have breached your assurance to me. You are following well and truly in the footsteps of your predecessor. Having said that, I would be very happy to hear information about what has happened since this unfortunate incident late last year.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There was a recommendation in relation to the introduction of structured decision making, and the department has undergone a range of processes, including engaging an external agency to develop training and procedures so we can introduce structured decision making from 1 July this year. That will include an intake event structured decision making tool to help with consistency of decision making by the intake staff. In addition, NTFC will review its family support policy later this year to ensure there are improved responses to families who need additional support identified through child protection notifications.

The Northern Territory government has a relatively small statutory child protection work force, and an intake screening and priority tool, which will include a focus on risk for children under two years of age, will be implemented from 1 July. In addition, we are engaging the same organisation to implement the family strengths and needs assessment tool for later this year. In addition, we are going to employ some practice advisors to ensure staff improve in their consistency of decision making and judgments.

As of 1 July, all notifications made by health professionals will be processed as child protection reports, and screened using the structured decision making screening tools. In addition we have developed a new policy for use by hospital staff for reporting child protection reports.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, to put it bluntly yes, there are problems with the department. We have problems because of suitably qualified people to work for us, many vacancies, and people coming in and out - it is a very stressful department. I know very well, and I have visited all areas and I was amazed by the strength of people working there. I have to admit, I would not want to be a child protection officer it is so stressful.

However, we would have taken steps, member for Araluen, and I understand you are like me, you were elected in 2001 - before 2001, if you think this is bad, you should see what was happening when Aboriginal kids were not even considered for protection, but this is not ...

Ms CARNEY: I do not think the system was described as in crisis. There was not an inquiry, and we did not get national and international attention for the appalling state of the child protection system in the Northern Territory. Let us not have a contest about back then; let us talk about now, and what you are doing.

Mr VATSKALIS: True, and we are the first government in the Territory not only - I am answering the question because it is very important. I know you are passionate about child protection ...

Ms CARNEY: Do not patronise me, minister. What is your answer to the question?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: We share a compassion for children services. I do not care if you say I patronise you or not. I know you are very concerned about it and we have to fix. That is the reason why this government has called the broadest inquiry ever that no other government in the Territory had ever done, and we put money into the bank to fix it. We know it is broken, it has to be fixed, and we are determined to fix it.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, what was your surname?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Gardiner-Barnes.

Ms CARNEY: Gardiner-Barnes, first name, Clare?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Clare.

Ms CARNEY: We have adopted a very informal approach over the last few days, with departmental officers and we have been referring to them by their Christian names. Do you mind if I ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That is perfectly all right.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, it is also shorter than your surname.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, it is.

Ms CARNEY: I thank you for your response. I have some more questions and I would like to go through them before too long. However, there was a second question. In fact, I asked three questions last Thursday, but the second one was not answered satisfactorily. I asked why, minister, based on an e-mail from the Director of Allied Services at Royal Darwin Hospital, social workers were asked to delay reporting suspected child abuse, notwithstanding that the law says it is to be reported as soon as possible.

The e-mail which I know you have a copy of - I do - said if notification is the endorsed action then this should occur verbally. In other words, there seems to be a policy at Royal Darwin Hospital for social workers to talk to their superiors first before reporting suspected child abuse. Why is that the case?

Mr VATSKALIS: I was explaining to you at the time, when people have a legal obligation, they have a legal obligation and they have to comply with it. If they speak to their supervisor about it, it is fair to speak to their supervisor but, at the same time, there is no way any supervisor, or any person, can ask that person to either delay the notification or not make a notification. They are obliged by law to do so, and they will do so.

I do not have a copy of the e-mail. I appreciate it if you can table the e-mail because I would like to follow it. If I find out anybody has instructed a person not to notify, or even to delay the notification, appropriate action will be taken. I ask Clare to respond to that as well.

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you, you have and that is fine. The fact that a structure seems to be put in place at RDH so that trained people report up the line, as opposed to members of the general public reporting as they are required to do as soon as possible, either to the police or the CEO, is troubling because it must surely result in further delays. Can you assure us that this structure, informal or formal, will not result in delays in the reporting and, if so, how can that be so?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have recently approved a new policy for hospital staff for reporting so the procedures are very clear for all staff. The policy requires that hospital staff are aware of their mandatory reporting, that they have access to relevant resources and training, make notifications on reasonable grounds, make a verbal report to NTFC intake team, and follow this up with a confirmation of a report of child harm exploitation using a formal form that has been developed, document in the medical record that a report has been forwarded to NTFC, advise their supervisor that a report to NTFC has been made and, then, maintain patient records to ensure all correspondence and communication is reflected.

Ms CARNEY: Are social workers at NTFC offices obliged or required, informally or otherwise, to consult with their superiors before making reports?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It would depend on the status of the person who was wanting to make the report.

Ms CARNEY: Social worker, child protection worker?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: No.

Ms CARNEY: No, they are not required?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: No, a social worker would just make a report.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, there is a different system for social workers at RDH?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: No, as I just read out, they are to make the report and, after they have made the report, they are to notify their supervisor.

Ms CARNEY: So, the e-mail from the Director of Allied Services at RDH saying that social workers, or workers at the hospital, should discuss the matter with the team leader and, if she is not available, then the Director of Allied Health, before making a report - that has gone now, has it?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. Minister, I would like to ask you some questions in relation to the Children's Commissioner's report called, A Report Relating to Child Protection Notifications made to NTFC in respect of Baby BM. You will recall that you tabled that report in parliament in February, and I do have the report, or at least I did have the report. In any event, you know the report. There were several recommendations from the Children's Commissioner. One was, and I will just read it quickly to refresh your memory:

NTFC policies and guidelines be amended to reflect the principle that the opinions of health and allied personnel who have worked directly with infants and young children and their caregivers should be afforded special consideration in assessing the risk status and intervening to ensure the wellbeing of children.

Has that been done and, if so, can you produce evidence of that?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: From 1 July, health professionals will be given a new status when they make reports, and they will be classified as child protection reports that will be forwarded through to determine whether or not a formal investigation needs to be undertaken.

Ms CARNEY: Why 1 July? This report was done in December, tabled in February. Why has it taken so long?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: 1 July is when the new structure decision-making tools will be introduced across the whole of the intake process, and so it is to ensure that there is consistency in decision at that time, and the information system has been updated to reflect that new tool.

Mr VATSKALIS: There were a number of difficulties with the information system. We could not retrieve information. There were problems with inputting information, so the government has provided funding to actually upgrade the system. Clare has been given instructions by me to proceed with the new upgrade. It does take time, but steps have been taken to address this. I would love to be able to do it in a week or two weeks, but I cannot. But action has been taken and things have been done in response to recommendations.

Ms CARNEY: The second recommendation from the report was:

NTFC develop specific guidance for the assessment of notifications involving infants and very young children that draws attention to their particular vulnerabilities and needs and that prompts consideration of a parent's capacity to ensure safety and wellbeing.

Clare, you referred to a focus on risk for children under two years earlier. Is that the answer to the question I have just asked?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct. The new tools have been specifically designed to address that issue, including issue of cumulative harm.

Ms CARNEY: Good. And that is part of the structured decision making?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, correct.

Ms CARNEY: The third recommendation in the report was that NTFC ensures that the new decision-making instrumentation, which I assume to mean SDN, to be used in its intake services, is specifically configured to identify and prompt appropriately for protective responses of cumulative harm. So you have just answered that question?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Why has it taken so long to implement a structured decision-making tool?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have engaged an overseas company to assist us, as other jurisdictions have, Queensland and South Australia. In addition, we have had to adapt our information system and ensure that the structured decision-making tools are tailored for the NT context, and our own legislation and procedures. So that has taken some time, as well as making sure the staff are fully trained before the commencement of the introduction of the tools.

Mr VATSKALIS: That particular, the SDN, has been developed by an American child research centre. Of course, it is totally different what happens in the Territory, even in Australia, different things between Western Australia, Queensland and the Territory. It had to be adapted because of special needs, and also taking into account the cultural considerations.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you would be aware of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 to 2020, signed up by the Commonwealth and every state and territory in April 2009. Was this government trying to intentionally mislead their colleagues in the other states and territories by putting, under the heading, 'Major Recent and Planned Reforms in the Territory', structured decision-making tools and systems? They were not in place. It is 18 months, or 15 months or thereabouts, since this was included, talk about gilding the lily. Did you just need to fill a page of what you are doing, or did you want to be seen as doing something?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, it is the intention of our government fix Children's Services and part of it is to adopt mechanisms, adopt tools that are actually going to work. I cannot develop one myself and in our jurisdiction we have not got the skills, and we have to get them from somewhere else. Yes, that was our intention, it takes time to develop it and, as I explained, it was developed overseas, it had to be adapted for our conditions and that takes time.

I know time sometimes looks longer than it takes, but it is not up to us, there are too many factors involved we can not have it in a week, or a month, or even six months ...

Ms CARNEY: Or a year.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... this takes time not only to develop it but also to train people to use it. What is the point of having the best program in place if ...

Ms CARNEY: You do not even have it in place, so do not even go to the training. You put it into place, then you train.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have to train the people to run it, you know that very well

Ms CARNEY: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is easy for you to say you have not got it in place. It is in place; people are being trained to use it, and it will be implemented on 1 July.

Ms CARNEY: The system will be up and running on the 1 July, then staff would have to be trained, so it will take some considerable time. Correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Currently staff is in training so when it goes up on 1 July people will be able to use it.

Ms CARNEY: In the present system there was a tool called the Integrated Offender Management System, Peter Toyne talked about it in 2002; I think it is just in the last year or so kicked off. So you will excuse me for being somewhat cynical about what you say and what actually happens in the department. I am still referring to this ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Just one moment. I will ask Peter Toyne next time I see him in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Go for it. He is actually in Melbourne, but I digress. In the national framework in April 2009 you indicated to your federal state and territory colleagues that another major, recent and planned reform was a practice advisor initiative to support casework practice. In an answer Clare gave before, she said the department is going to employ a practice advisor. So, minister, when will the practice advisor be employed, and why has it taken so very long to even think about employing one?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Indigenous practice advisor has already been employed, and there is further recruitment being undertaken at the moment to employ additional practice advisors.

Ms CARNEY: When exactly?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are recruiting right now for additional staff.

Ms CARNEY: So April 2009 there was a practice advisor initiative, so perhaps by the end of 2010 we might have some?

Mr VATSKALIS: Clare has said already a practice advisor has been employed.

Ms CARNEY: That is one, that is the Indigenous one, and you know it is broader than that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and further practice advisors will be employed. There are not many of them around Australia we have to look for people qualified everywhere, even in the UK and New Zealand, and we do so.

Ms CARNEY: In relation to the other report you tabled in February, the Children's Commissioner report called Interim Progress Reporting to the Northern Territory Family and Children Intake and Response Processes, you will remember, minister, report was requested by your predecessor in November last year in response to a number of media and other reports alleging there were problems, amongst other things, with responsiveness in NTFC. The Children's Commission said in his report, and I quote:

On 5 January he [and he was referring to you] wrote to the Children's Commissioner requesting that an interim report be provided along with the full report of the Board of Inquiry.

As you know, the inquiry has been granted another extension and will not report until September. Have you asked for the interim report to be provided to you prior to September?

Mr VATSKALIS: For the inquiry?

Ms CARNEY: Put it this way: in January you said to the Children's Commissioner in a letter, yes, I

know you have an interim report; basically, bundle it up and put it with the Board of Inquiry. Have you got another, separate report, and have you ask for one, from the Children's Commissioner, or is the status of this still interim, to be considered by the inquiry?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is still an interim report and it is going to be assessed as part of the inquiry.

Ms CARNEY: A number of recommendations in the report were described as draft, and I am not going to go through them all. I think there half a dozen or thereabouts. Three, in particular, are troubling. One of them was NTFC immediately review its training program for the central intake team staff members to ensure that all workers receive training in core child protection issues, critical decision making, and cultural awareness as part of this orientation programs for working in the CIT. Has that been done?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and Clare can explain that.

Ms CARNEY: The answer has been provided, so yes that has been done. Another recommendation was the staffing level of the central intake team be increased by two full-time workers, and a systemic review of case loads and other workforce needs in the CIT be undertaken by NTFC. Has that been done?

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice is yes, but I will let Clare expand on that.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The current staffing for the Central Intake Team is held within the Child Abuse Taskforce, and at the moment there are 13 Child Abuse Taskforce staff members in CAT North, and three in CAT South, and that includes the staff of the intake team.

Ms CARNEY: Put it this way, has the staffing level of the central intake team been increased by two full-time workers, as recommended by the Children's Commissioner in his report tabled in February?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That is correct.

Ms CARNEY: When were they employed?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will have to take that question on notice for the dates of their employment.

Ms CARNEY: Question on notice, Mr Chairman.

Question on Notice No 7.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind repeating that question?

Ms CARNEY: When were the two additional full-time workers employed in the central intake team?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A matter of housekeeping, when officials are taking note of a question on notice, could you please note of the question number so the minister has opportunity, later in the Estimates Committee process, to answer that question. He can refer to the number, and *Hansard* can easily find it.

Ms CARNEY: A follow-up question, and this may need to be on notice, but you may be able to

answer it. Are they full-time workers? Can you answer that one?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, they are full-time.

Ms CARNEY: The last of the half dozen or so recommendations was that NTFC act to immediately address the backlogs involving initial assessments and case allocation, and to give priority to implementing the recruitment and retention strategies developed by their internal review team. Has that been done?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will begin to answer the question by saying intensive work has been undertaken by the central intake team to address the backlog, including staff working additional hours and over weekends to reduce that backlog. Recently, I was provided with data that it was reduced to almost zero.

Ms CARNEY: Is that backlog in the central intake team?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Specifically?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: It is near zero?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It was at that time.

Ms CARNEY: When was that?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That was a couple of weeks ago.

Ms CARNEY: What about other case backlogs referred to in one of the coronial findings? There was a backlog of cases, some cases with no one getting to them for months and months. What is the situation there?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There are still pressures on the intake team in responding in a timely way to getting matters addressed. That is an ongoing issue to ensure we have the initial assessment undertaken by experienced staff in a timely way. That is something we are constantly working through with the intake team to ensure there are staffing levels addressed to address that backlog.

Mr VATSKALIS: There is also a significant number of notifications, a significant increase from past years. In 2007-08, there were 3616 notifications; in 2008-09, it went up to 6189 notifications. Also, a lot of these notifications have been assessed. Some of them they follow because they are valid, some of them they find that people moved interstate, they were false allegations, there was insufficient information, or some of them did not warrant any further assessment. And 2819 were proceeded to investigation.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The Children's Commissioner, in his report, said there was 'a recent external review into the intake services', and made a number of recommendations in that review to improve the efficiency of the services and, thus, increase capacity. The Children's Commissioner was referring to the Tolhurst review in June 2009. Have all of those recommendations been implemented?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were 41 recommendations. The department accepted the recommendations and proceeded to implement them. Some of them are currently under way, others we are progressing, and some of them have already been adopted. But, Clare can answer on that.

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Ms GARDINER-BARNES: There are 15 recommendations which have been implemented, including intake event and the resolution of policy issues impacting on workflow. Fourteen recommendations will be implemented on July 2010, with seven of the 14 recommendations relating to structured decision-making ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, can I interrupt? Is that 14 part of the 15 recommendations?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: No, that is a separate 14.

Ms CARNEY: That is additional. So, we will be up to 29 out of 41?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Seven of the 14 recommendations relate to structured decision-making and will be implemented on 1 July. The remainder of the recommendations relate to work processes - for example, installation or upgrade of a new phone system - and we are planning for implementation in mid-July 2010.

Five of the recommendations are not within the scope of the implementation project that we have commenced; for example, the development of the differential response framework and the management of the child protection workload. Seven of the recommendations relate to ongoing activities; for example, improving work flow, recruiting additional staff, and designing the service model.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, what budgetary allocation was made in the budget to ensure that half of, or thereabouts – a bit over half - of the recommendations will be implemented? You made no mention in your budget response.

Mr VATSKALIS: Our budget has increased significantly. On top of our budget, we have actually provided extra money to hire extra people. We have allocated \$40m to employ 76 people in order to fill some of the gaps and to address some of these recommendations. Most of these people will be frontline - 64 will be frontline, different levels. Some of them will be university qualified, other people will be frontline, but will not be university qualified, because not everybody has to be a Child Protection Officer. Some of them will be assisting, and some of them will have to provide support.

Ms CARNEY: I have some specific questions about that new staffing allocation, but can we not get to that now? My question was what is the chunk, if you like, from this budget that goes to increasing the capacity of the department to implement these recommendations because, clearly, it is resource intensive. So, has a chunk been allocated?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. We have allocated \$87 000 for consultancy for the SDM, the structure, and we have \$50 000 worth of telephone system, and have provided additional staff to intake to increase the number of baseline staff and team leaders. Of course, money was allocated for the Tolhurst consultancy.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, no specific allocation over an above that?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. How many intake workers are currently employed in the Central Intake Team?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Central Intake Team, including after hours team, staff establishment as at 30 April was 16, plus two casual P2 staff.

Ms CARNEY: So, of the 16, how many are P1s and how many are P2s?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind just repeating it for Hansard?

Ms CARNEY: Of the 16 intake workers currently employed in the Central Intake Team, how many are employed at the level of P1, and how many are employed at the level of P2?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a specific question?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. The reason I ask is that it is clear that the Children's Commissioner and the Tolhurst report said that the intake team was not coping, and it had serious, indeed, severe, capacity problems. At the time of the Children's Commissioner report, there were, I understand, eight, three of whom were P2s and the remainder were P1s, and I would have thought that if you were looking to increase capacity and expertise of child protection workers to make the system work better, you would be looking at getting more P2s.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Correct.

Ms CARNEY: Nodding heads everywhere, and I look forward to the answer in due course.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.2.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you did a radio interview on 18 February, and during that interview, I think it was with the ABC, you said:

I have spoken already to the new Acting Director of the department. I have given her clear directions that she has to go in, use a broom, and get rid of people that cannot deliver. Nothing is going to be fixed unless we have got a department that functions properly.

Since then, how many people have, as you so delicately described it, been got rid of?

Mr VATSKALIS: Oh, I think I will hand that to Clare.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I will have to take that question on notice. I think it is important to put in context that there are a lot of workers in the child protection system who are putting in incredible hours and are putting in an incredible effort to meet with the increase of demand in the child protection area, and my efforts have been on trying to support those staff to do the job that they are employed to do and do it well.

Question on Notice No 7.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind just repeating it for Hansard?

Ms CARNEY: Since your interview on 18 February, in which you said that you gave instructions to the new Acting Director of the department to get rid of people, how many have been got rid of? Which is a very badly worded question, but it is the question in any event. My English teacher will never forgive me for asking a question like that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.3.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, as Clare said, her aim is at the support staff, because there were people actually that decided to go somewhere else, and they left themselves, but I have to admit that, in the past few months since Clare has taken on that, we have seen significant improvement in the performance of the department, and that can be attributed to both the leadership, second, to make clear the targets and what the government wants, and certainly supporting staff and additional staffing employed.

Now, getting rid of people, they can be either dismissed, or make clear to them that it might be time to find a new job, and give them two options.

Ms CARNEY: Well, you were beating your chest, it seems to me, on ABC radio, saying:

I have told the department to go in and get rid of people.

It is extraordinary that, at estimates, you do not know how many people have been got rid of. Your predecessor, despite her obvious incompetence, clearly was not listened to by senior bureaucrats. Should I be concerned, and should others be concerned, that either you are not being listened to by senior bureaucrats, or they are not following through with your clear direction?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Araluen, first of all, under our Westminster system the minister does not hire or fire; that is the role of the bureaucrats. It would be really alarming if the minister says: 'Yes (inaudible) because I said so'. I think senior public servants get paid more than ministers to do these kinds of jobs. And, for your information, in 2009 to date we had 192 commencements and 96 (inaudible) separations.

Ms CARNEY: No doubt. But my question, you cheeky thing, is how many have been got rid of? You represented in a radio interview to Territorians that you were the new guy, you were going to go in there and act, you were going to get rid of people, and you cannot even answer how many have been got rid of.

Mr VATSKALIS: I just told you, 96.

Ms CARNEY: No, do not weasel; I am not going to put up with that. It is just indescribable the extent to which you do ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You asked a question, and you got an answer.

Ms CARNEY: Ninety six separations is not like the minister beating his chest and instructing, giving a very clear directive, to the Acting Director to get rid of people. You and I both know that is a fundamental difference.

Mr VATSKALIS: I asked the Acting Director to go in and do whatever was necessary to fix the problem. If that meant people had to go, that was her decision.

Ms CARNEY: You said: 'Use a broom'?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, that is what I told you: use a broom to clean the department. How she is going to do it is her choice - or his choice - whoever it is. Public servants do the job, not the minister.

Ms CARNEY: Well, it seems to me that in the area of child protection, with one exception - the member for Arafura - who, whilst I am yet to find a perfect, or anywhere near perfect, Labor

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government minister in the Northern Territory, at least tried considerably harder than her successors. So, I am well aware of the structure of the department; I am well aware of your role, I just wish that you were well aware of our role.

Minister, on ABC radio on 18 February in your chest beating interview, you said, and I quote:

Obviously there has not been enough leadership in the department.

David Ashbridge, the former CEO resigned in February. Jenny Scott, the former Executive Director, resigned from her position in November. They were both, as of last week, listed on the website, I have not checked this week. Neither of them has been replaced. You said you were going to act quickly, you were not going to wait for another two or three months, things were going to happen. You have not even replaced the key senior bureaucrats in your department. When you were talking about bad leadership, were you referring to your own?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, you probably notice next to me is the Acting Director, and we currently have a recruitment process in place to employ the new CEO of the department. So, I think it is fair that the new CEO be part of the people who select a number of senior positions in the department, rather than actually going out to choose who is going to be the permanent director. But, I have to say, I am very happy with Ms Gardiner-Barnes' performance. She has provided the necessary leadership, and we can see that from the way the department is operating.

We are currently going through a recruitment process and I intend to finalise it soon; then the new CEO, whoever he or she may be, will be part of the team that will select the senior positions. On the other hand, as you are well aware, I made clear my intention that it might be an idea to separate the departments, and I will be considering that view the outcome of the inquiry. I think it is fair to wait for the inquiry outcome before we decide who to recruit, because we might have to recruit another director of the new department.

Ms CARNEY: It has been a long time, though. When you talk about leadership in the department, and I am sure, clearly, the acting directors or CEO are doing a good job, but you are the minister, you have been the minister for some time. The CEO resigned in February, Jenny Scott resigned in November; that does seem to be a significantly long period, and there does not seem to be very much hope on the horizon. Recruitment has started, but when will it end?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have been the minister for this department for seven months, including Children's Services. Dr Ashbridge resigned in February, that is about three months ago, and I think we have to wait until his position is filled, because of leave provisions and everything else, before we start recruiting. We have put a very good team together to select a new CEO, and I think the process is at the interview stage, and very soon we will know the recommended person.

Ms CARNEY: In your interview on 18 February, you said and I quote: 'How can we actually get people to work in such a sensitive area without providing adequate support'. What support have you provided to people who work in this sensitive area since you have made those comments?

Mr VATSKALIS: First of all we provided a leader - a new director, we have also provided training, and we have provided tools like the structure - decision making tools, and we have provided people. The other thing is extra staff. One of the things we find amazing is we have many professional staff supported by a very small number of admin staff who are capable of maintaining an office. I know from my own experience, sometimes capable admin staff makes or breaks an office.

Ms CARNEY: In your interview on 18 February, you said: 'We will employ child nurses in our department now to take with us when we go to assess children. At least a specialist can have a look at the child and assess if it is sick or not'. How many child nurses have been employed since you made those comments?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is still my intention to do that one. However ...

Ms CARNEY: Another one you will get to!

Mr VATSKALIS: You hear my interviews - read my interviews, at least - it says we have a broad inquiry at the moment, and we should await the recommendations before we act on these kind of decisions. It is my intention to have someone in the department who can monitor children's health, however, I will wait for the inquiry to be finalised before we proceed with change.

Ms CARNEY: When you made those comments on 18 February, you did not know the inquiry was going to seek two extensions. You did not know it would be September until the inquiry releases its recommendations. Do you think it is good enough to say to the public on radio, you are going to do this, you are going to do that, and then not do anything and wait for someone else to tell you how? Is that appropriate?

Mr VATSKALIS: Let us be fair. At the time we believed the inquiry would finish at the end of April. There was an extension, Dr Bath and the panel saw me again saying because of the overwhelming volume of material they received, and the personal interviews and input, they would need more time to evaluate it. I would rather have a good inquiry which considered all evidence, rather than one which has to finish because we say it has to finish at that time.

I think it is fair to provide the extension - it was provided by the Chief Minister. I am very, very happy to wait the extra month or two months to have an inquiry which is comprehensive, and provides good recommendations.

Ms CARNEY: I know the member for Macdonnell has several questions, however I want to finish this section before going to another one. In your chest-beating interview on 18 February, you said: 'Nothing is going to be fixed unless we have got a department that functions properly'. Minister, the system was described by you, and others, as in crisis six months ago. Can you say to this committee that the department is functioning properly?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department functions better than it was functioning before, but I do not think the department is at the level we want it to operate. The pressures are enormous - significant pressure from out-of-urban centres, significant pressures relating to Indigenous children. We try our best to recruit people; we do our best to improve the tools, and to improve the processes. I think the directors do a tremendous job, and also because it (inaudible) the department has responded. I would not say we are perfect, I would not say we are very, very good; I will say we are doing better than we were doing before.

Ms CARNEY: In a ministerial statement on 24 August 2004, minister Scrymgour said, and I quote: 'We will take bold action when required to protect children'. When will that bold action to protect children start?

Mr VATSKALIS: It started when minister Scrymgour was minister, because she was the one who first increased the budget, she is the one who first recruited people after the failure of the previous government in the 1990s to address the issue of child protection. It is not new; it did not happen from 2001 onwards; it has been happening for years.

It is very easy to ignore what happened in the past. Admittedly you were not a member of the previous government. At the same time, you cannot blame our government for mistakes made for many, many years where we had to pick up the pieces and fix things.

Ms CARNEY: In parliament on 14 June 2006, minister Lawrie, another failed minister in this area, said:

We will have child protection workers, properly resourced, doing that work in our communities. They will work together with police, and we will make sure that we are giving the best protection we can to our children, wherever they are: Darwin, Alice Springs or a remote community.

When will that start?

Mr VATSKALIS: That has already been done. That has already commenced. We now safe houses in communities, something that your party, when it was in government, ignored or did not want to do, for the simple reason you did not care if it was out of Darwin or the northern suburbs. We started and put a lot of money; we increased the budget from a pittance of \$7m for child protection to significantly more - five or six times more - in order to address these issues. We will continue to do so. It will be step by step; it cannot be done today because it is physically impossible to get the people. We have to train people; we have to look at new models, and we are going to actually consider different ways of doing business.

Ms CARNEY: The fact is notifications are increasing significantly. There are two Coronial inquests which will forever be a damning indictment on your government's lack of commitment to this area. The Ombudsman, earlier this year, remarked that notwithstanding the money your government has put into this area - courtesy of the GST revenue, of course - the results are not there. The system is in crisis, hence, there is a child protection inquiry which, I might say, your government was dragged kicking and screaming to. So, please do not lecture me on the past; we are talking about the present and the Labor administration's incompetence in this area for years.

We those comments, I will defer to the member for Macdonnell, and I will come back and ask some more ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Just before, member for Araluen, I would like to make a response to that. The system is in crisis not because of the election of the Labor government in 2001. The system is in crisis because of the incompetence and the unwillingness of the CLP government to address the issue when it was raised ...

Mr TOLLNER: Oh, you have had your chance, Kon, haven't you?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... when it was raised - 27 years history cannot be wiped out ...

Ms CARNEY: The system was not in crisis needing international and national attention.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... with a statement by you today.

Ms CARNEY: That is just outrageous. Anyway, member for Macdonnell.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I point out she goes in order. It should have been the member for Nelson first. Member for Nelson, do you have any questions at this point? No.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, on this media release there was \$14.6m allocated to new positions in child protection. Can you give us a breakdown of where the new positions will be - Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs? Are they new positions, or are you just turning existing positions that are already in the department?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Clare to respond to you.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I have a detailed table here that outlines that there will be, of the 76 additional positions, five allocated to Darwin, two to Katherine, 21 to Alice Springs, another one to Darwin, three to Casuarina, three to Palmerston, three to central intake in Darwin, one in Alice

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Springs, the three remote workers in Darwin who work out of Darwin, four in Katherine, three in Tennant Creek, three in ...

Ms CARNEY: Could you please table the document?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no, I like listening to it.

Ms CARNEY: Could you table the document?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: ... three in Gove ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is at the minister's call how they answer.

Mr VATSKALIS: Other people would like to listen to how many people go to Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, notwithstanding that, could you table it anyway?

Mr VATSKALIS: After we have read it out.

Ms ANDERSON: After you can table it if you could, please.

Mr Tollner: It is wasting ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I object to that. Twenty-one people in Alice Springs I believe is very significant. The member for Macdonnell asked how many people we have in remote. It is only fair that people in remote communities know that our government is committed to put people out of Darwin, not only in Darwin.

Ms Scrymgour: Well, they cannot keep it at the Berrimah Line.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is right.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Three more in Gove, 10 further in Alice Springs, and 14 in remote communities.

Mr VATSKALIS: And we are very happy to table that.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, Clare, and thank you, minister. Just to go back, the member for Araluen asked you a question previously about safe houses. You said there are safe houses in communities now. Can you give me community names as to where you have the safe houses for protecting children?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, so ...

Ms ANDERSON: And, if it is a long list, Clare, can you table that list as well, please?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, so ...

Ms ANDERSON: After you read of it, of course.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The details around the safe houses and safe places are related to Output 1.5, so would you like me to ...

Ms ANDERSON: I will take it in 1.5, Clare, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay.

Ms ANDERSON: The next question, minister, is – and if you do not have the statistics on this, because this is a real serious question, because we simply remove children to protect children from an unsafe environment, and the reason why I am asking you this question is because I want to know, from the time you remove a child, how many placements that child has, from zero to five, and I will read you the question just in case you need to take it on notice.

Of all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged zero to six in care of the CEO of the Northern Territory Families and Children, how many of these children have multiple placements, including respite placements, since they entered the care of the CEO, and what is the average number of placements per child?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The measure in relation to child placements is actually dealt with in the output relating to Out of Home Care, 1.3, but specifically in relation to that question, we cannot actually do a breakdown on age. We are happy to take the question on notice and answer it as best we can within the parameters of our information system.

Ms ANDERSON: And that would have to include the respite care as well that that child has, not just the fact that it moved from three different people in its entire life, but the respite that it had for the weekend, and then someone might take it on because you are short of carers for two months, and then it moves on to someone else that might have it for six months, so that would include all that data as well, Clare?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, we will try and track the whole story for you.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you mind, member for Macdonnell, then putting that as a question now that you have sorted those differences out?

Ms ANDERSON: Of all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged zero to six in care of the CEO of the Northern Territory Families and Children, how many of these children have had multiple placements, including respite placements, since they entered the care of the CEO, and what is the average number of placements per child?

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.4.

Ms ANDERSON: So, minister, just at the introduction of your introducing yourself to Estimates, I asked whether I could ask a question of the task force, and the very reason why I want to ask this question, this is a really serious question, how does the task force determine, when a child is being interviewed, the interpreter? For example, a Lhere Artepe child, how do you determine, or the task force determine the interpreter?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The Child Abuse Task Force, when they visit remote communities, has a very difficult situation to deal with when those young children and their carers do not have English as their first language. Often they will access the support provided in the health clinic by the health clinic staff to act as interpreters for the purposes of undertaking an interview as part of the investigation process.

Ms ANDERSON: So, non-Indigenous speaking health staff or Aboriginal Health Workers?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Indigenous health workers, and so, in those communities, those workers will try and find an appropriately qualified person who is local in the community who can act as an interpreter, but also understand the ethical issues that they are dealing with if they are part of that interview process, and so, when they visit those communities, they will do their best to try and ensure that the interpreter services can be provided for that child in a respectful way.

Ms ANDERSON: Is that written somewhere so that it is adhered to by the task force so that they do not make mistakes?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I am not sure if it is part of the exact procedural manual, but I can check that and get back to you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want that on notice?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, we will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you just summarize the question for the purposes of Hansard.

Ms ANDERSON: I am just asking off the cuff. So the question would be: is there anything written for the task force to adhere to, rules and regulations and views of an interpreter?

Mr CHAIRMAN: So it is No 7.5.

Ms ANDERSON: And this is, Clare, where I want to go into a specific case. You had a child disclose abuse. It was reported - it makes me upset because it is close to me - and an interview took place. The child is a nine year-old girl who speaks Luritja-Pintubi, but the interpreter you got was Pitjantjatjara. Now, that is like Spanish and Portuguese, two different dialects. And I will just use a couple of words in my language, which is the little girl's language: if someone was saying: 'Are you telling the truth?' in my language, Luritja-Pintubi, you would just say: (in language). So that you can see the difference, in Pitjantjatjara: (in language)

I believe, because I spoke to the mother last week in between sittings, the child did not engage or respond in that interview. Now, that has to be a major concern, minister, for you and to all of us as members, as politicians, representing these children.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you, member for Macdonnell. We live in a multicultural society and we have a variety of languages not only within the Aboriginal population but we have various languages and expressions with people from a non-English speaking background; and I will encourage you to provide this information to me personally, if you wish to, and I will personally make sure it will be followed up.

Ms ANDERSON: And the other thing is, the perpetrator is still on the community. The child is still in the community. As of last week, this last weekend, that is specifically why I went home to check to see if that child was in the community. That shows me that we do not have the best interests of the child if we put that child back into the same community waiting for an investigation to happen - we place the child back into the same community with the same perpetrator.

There was another little girl involved in this same case. I happened to be in the community on that day for a totally different reason when the task force come in. When the child was interviewed, like you said minister, at the clinic, there was no Indigenous Health Workers, there was not one Indigenous person in that interview.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I am happy to follow that case up and ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, provide the information and we will follow that up as a matter of urgency.

Ms ANDERSON: My concern, minister, when these matters are raised we can keep following these things through, but as we speak, as we sit here today and discuss these major issues, those children are still in the care. The matter has been reported, it is obvious it has been investigated, but the mother does not know what is going to happen because no one has been talking to her. She has been told the DNA is going to take seven months, so the poor child has to wait in the community with the perpetrator for seven months while this is all being investigated. As of last week, or two weeks ago, the alleged perpetrator was allowed to still work with children, through MacDonnell Shire, doing youth activities, youth programs on that community, and was only given his blue ticket two weeks ago.

Mr VATSKALIS: Considering that the media is here, and the events you actually said might identify the child, I urge you to come to us privately, and we will follow this up.

Ms ANDERSON: I will talk to you, but this is the matter you should be aware of, minister. You have been investigating this matter. As far as the mother is concerned - and I spoke to the mother on the weekend - she does not know what is going on.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will follow it up straight away.

Ms ANDERSON: At the end of the day, it is about protection of the children. Yet we put these children, for whatever reason, back into these communities. How do we know these children will not be perpetrated by these abusers as we sit here and speak? That is my biggest concern. As the member for Araluen has said, we have to be about protecting children, making sure children are safe. If we do not have anywhere to place these children while the investigation is being conducted, I do not think we should be putting them back into the same environment. This poor child has to walk around in that community seeing this perpetrator during the day. When she goes to the shop, the perpetrator is inside the shop. The mental scars we create unintentionally when placing these children back into communities is terrible. We must be as guilty as the perpetrators for doing that.

If there needs to be a court case, I think we all need to front it as people who should be looking after their children. The directors, the minister, myself as a local member, the member for Araluen, the member for Arafura, we must all be guilty of these crimes because we are putting these children back into the same environment. It is not protecting this child at all.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I am very concerned by the issues you have raised here this morning, and would like to follow it up as a matter of urgency.

Ms ANDERSON: I will talk to you, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, speak to Clare and me, give us information and we will follow it up.

Ms ANDERSON: The other question I have, minister, is just about foster carers.

A Person Unknown: That is Output 1.3

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Following on from the very serious matter the member for Macdonnell has raised, I hope the minister's personal assurance to you, member for Macdonnell, is worth more than his personal assurance in getting back to me.

The child abuse task force in Central Australia, I asked questions about this - and it will be of particular interest to the member for Macdonnell - at estimates last year. I am talking Child Abuse

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Task Force, Alice Springs. At that time it only had three child protection workers in it. In last year's budget, there was a \$6.5m, or thereabouts, allocation for the Child Abuse Task Force. Jenny Scott gave evidence to the committee saying the department would aim to have at least three additional positions in the task force in Alice Springs that year.

Document number 834, tabled on Tuesday, clearly shows - and this is where your government continues to fail - the establishment is four. Last year's comments were evidently misleading about the expectation there were going to be more people in the Child Abuse Task Force in Alice Springs. The actual number was three. There has not been an increase in staff in this critical area, which may well have been of great assistance, and should be of great assistance to the member for Macdonnell's constituents, and for the child in question. Why oh why has there not been an increase to the Child Abuse Task Force in the southern region.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Child Abuse Task Force South has four Northern Territory police investigators, two Australian Federal Police officers, and two child protection practitioners. In addition, Northern Territory Family and Children Services has a team of four Aboriginal community resource workers, and a team leader. From July 2010, the new community welfare worker position are to be created in CAT North, and one supernumerary position will be created in CAT South. That is a number of people working now with Child Abuse Task Force.

Ms CARNEY: According to a document tabled on Tuesday to this committee, there were three actual people in the Child Abuse Task Force in the southern region. That is a desperate situation, I would have thought.

Mr VATSKALIS: The advice I have - and today is Thursday, two days later than Tuesday - is that there are - and I repeat again - four Northern Territory police investigators, two Australian Federal Police officers, and two child protection practitioners ...

Ms CARNEY: So, four police and two child practitioners?

Mr VATSKALIS: And two Australian Federal Police officers.

Ms CARNEY: Hang on. Can I just make sure I have you ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Four Northern Territory ...

Ms CARNEY: Do not worry about the police. Two child protection workers. Correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Practitioners including the team leader.

Ms CARNEY: Right. Two child protection practitioners in the Child Abuse Task Force in the southern region is not what the government represented it would provide. It is not in line with evidence to this committee last year, and is just not satisfactory, particularly in light of the issues raised by the member for Macdonnell. Minister, will you commit that, by the time we do this process again in June next year, there will be more specialist child protection workers in the Child Abuse Task Force in the southern region?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, I said before we actually allocated money in the budget - extra money ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, you did. They are not filled.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on a minute. These are the things we actually look at. The number of child sexual abuse cases and the workload in the area will address this issue. Certainly, we see we need

more people. We have the money on the table; we are going to get more people. That is clearly what direction will be given to the child services.

Ms CARNEY: Well, some kids in the Northern Territory, if they could understand the messages coming from this government, would be well and truly sick and tired of this government saying, 'We are going to do this and we are going to do that'. Clearly, not enough has been done.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have been doing things. From July 2008 to April 2010, both Child Abuse Task Force officers in the south have worked with 370 individual children. We have 107 arrests ...

Ms CARNEY: Minister, my question is in relation to staff. If I want to hear more about what the task force does - as if I did not already know - I would have asked you that question. So, thank you, you have answered my question which was very specific in relation to employment at CAT Southern Region.

I would like to ask you now about recommendations made by the Coroner in the Melville inquest, the findings of which were delivered in January this year. The Coroner said, at page 77 of his findings that, the *Care and Protection of Children Act* is

... deficient in that it weakens the statutory obligations of the minister or, relevantly the CEO, to provide the protection needed for those children.

My question is: the act has not been changed, why not?

Mr VATSKALIS: A number of the proposed recommendations are likely to be impacted by the new national standard for children's care which is going to be finalised by the end of 2010 and, any legislative change we make in consort with the new standards, as required. A lot of changes will be made to operation of policy and practice to reflect recommendation 1 to 8, and recommendations 9 to 14 concentrate on operation of ...

Ms CARNEY: Can you just slow down a bit, please?

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay. The recommendations 1 to 8 refer to changes that will be made to operation and policies, and recommendations 9 to 14 concentrate on operational issues with a focus on improving internal systems. As Clare mentioned before, this is already under way.

However, changes to the act will take place because it is more likely some of these amendments to the act to be impacted by the National Standards for Children in Care, and we have to do it in consort with these standards. Clare can ...

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you, I have the answer to my question, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister can choose how to answer and, if he wishes to defer to an officer he is allowed to.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, he answered the question ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like Clare to explain it ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: And he is allowed to expand.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like her to explain it ...

Ms CARNEY: So you can learn more about what you need to do.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because you can hear more about what we are doing.

Ms CARNEY: Well, he is not undeserving. Clare.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are in the process of making operational amendments to our policies and procedures to reflect the recommendations that were outlined to be put into legislation, but given there is the inquiry going on and we are likely to have quite a few legislative changes come out of the inquiry anticipated, then the thinking was that we would do all of those changes all at once following the inquiry recommendations coming down.

Ms CARNEY: And you agree with that, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely! That is why I want you to hear it from the director, so it is not politics, it is real.

Ms CARNEY: There are national standards, but I gather from you, Clare, agreed to by the minister, that you will also wait for the inquiry to consider these?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: But in the meantime we are changing our operational policy to reflect the recommendations so that, in practice, that is what we are going to work towards.

Ms CARNEY: I propose to go through some of the specific recommendations of the inquiry. The minister rattled off chunks of this and chunks of that, but my questions are specific for good reason. At page 78 of the Melville Inquest findings, the Coroner said that the act contains a similar provision to section 53(1) of the old *Community Welfare Act*, requiring an authorised person to visit a child in the care of the minister at least every two months, and to require the person to furnish a report concerning the child and his or her welfare, but there was nothing in the new act similar to section 53(1) of the old act requiring a worker to see the child every two months. Why has not that act, and if your answer is the same, just for *Hansard*, please say no, refer to above, or whatever, but why has not that part of the act been changed?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is the same answer, that we are changing our operational policy to reflect the recommendations at this stage.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so changing policy. I take it your answer is the same for waiting for the inquiry as well in September? So the policy is changing, and you are waiting for the inquiry, and there is a link with national standards towards the end of the year, correct?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The Coroner identified another problem and said that:

One of the critical deficiencies identified in this inquest was the absence of the benchmarks by which case workers could determine whether a carer was providing an adequate standard of care to the children. Section 63 of the Community Welfare Act set out some basic standards with which the minister was required to be satisfied before registering a carer. In my opinion, the Coroner said, it is important that certain minimum benchmarks be set out in regulations which have legal force.

Why has not the act and regulations been amended accordingly?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have draft regulations that are in train at the moment and they are expected to go to Executive Council in July this year.

Ms CARNEY: Were they the draft regulations about which Ms Scott gave evidence in June last year?

Sorry, she gave evidence at the coronial inquest about regulations being drafted.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Can I introduce Leonie Warburton. Leonie is the Senior Director of Out of Home Care Services in NTFC.

Ms WARBURTON: I am trying to think back, because I was here while Ms Scott gave her evidence. If they are the provisions under the *Community Welfare Act* under section 63, the draft regulations which Clare has just referred to are comparable to those that were under the previous *Community Welfare Act*, section 63, so we have really just lifted them up, and now we are looking to place those as the placement regulations under the new *Care and Protection of Children Act*.

Ms CARNEY: Of course, the coronial findings were delivered in January, but as we know, the case went over for a significant period of time in 2008, I think. Okay. So the regulations will be done at some point, they are in the pipeline?

Ms WARBURTON: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The Coroner was also concerned about the lack of external review in the act. He noted that the act created the position of Children's Commissioner, however he said:

There is no provision in the act which guides or controls the Commissioner in how to exercise his functions. No specific powers are conferred on the Commissioner to obtain documents, examine persons, or carry out types of investigations. This is in contrast to the detailed provisions about the Commissioner's powers to investigate complaints. The act should be amended to remedy those significant omissions.

Why has the act not been amended as recommended by the Coroner?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, at the risk of repeating myself, I said we have an inquiry coming up, the inquiry will provide a number of recommendations the government has already said we are going to adopt and, I expect, because they brought on an inquiry, a number of these issues would be erased. I think it is premature for us to change the act or to amend the act before the end of the inquiry. However, we will be using the whole package of the Coroner's inquiry and the inquiry recommendations in order to proceed to do the necessary amendments to the act.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Recommendation 7 from the Melville Inquest was:

Part 5.1 of the act should be amended to provide for a regular two yearly review of the administration of the act insofar as it relates to protected children and to confer more specific powers on the Children's Commissioner to enable him or her to conduct such a review.

Just for the sake of the record, I assume it is the same answer you have provided, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: And I think it is a fair recommendation that would be considered when we actually go back and we have a look at the recommendations.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, your predecessor did not take up our recommendation for the inquiry to have as one of its terms of reference to inquire into whether existing legislation is adequate to provide effective child protection services. Hence, legislative change – and you should know this – is not going to be considered by the inquiry. You have said repeatedly in answer to my questions: 'No, we are not going to make that change; we are waiting for the inquiry.' They are not even within the terms of reference of the inquiry.

Minister, it is clear you are not across this. It is clear to me and, I am sure, others, that you are just not doing anything because you cannot be bothered and you do not care, and you just want to wait until the inquiry whereupon, apparently, everything is going to magically fix itself. You must have known

that the inquiry does not consider whether existing legislation is adequate.

Mr VATSKALIS: I resent your accusations for the simple reason the inquiry will come down with a number of recommendations. These recommendations, despite the fact it is not in their terms of reference to look at the legislation, will have a certain impact on what we have to do and how we are going to address it, and there will be incidents we have to address and amend the legislation. As a matter of fact, next Wednesday there will be a workshop for legislative changes in the act. We are looking at many aspects – you do not have to specifically put it in the terms of reference to look at the legislation. A number of these recommendations will come, I am sure will come, because of experience I have had since I have been in the portfolio that requires some, if not big changes in the legislation, and we are prepared to do that.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you are presumably aware of the *Inquiries Act*, you are presumably aware of the purpose of giving an inquiry terms of reference.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Ms CARNEY: Are you seriously suggesting that you do nothing, that the inquiry looks at things beyond its brief, and therefore that is a satisfactory situation? You are kidding me.

Mr VATSKALIS: The terms of reference for the inquiry were drafted before my time as minister ...

Ms CARNEY: Oh, not your fault? Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am giving you my assurance, should amendments be required to the legislation. It will happen.

Ms CARNEY: Right. Have you told the board of inquiry, have you amended the terms of reference so the board of inquiry does have within its remit to comment on the adequacy or otherwise of Northern Territory legislation for the protection of children? Have you told them that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have in the panel three experts in child protection. They are not just following the government's line; these people are given free rein to do whatever it takes to fix the problems, to identify the problems with child protection services in the Northern Territory. These people are going to come with a stack of recommendations, these are what we are going to examine, assess and adopt, and make the necessary changes at as many levels of the organisation and the legislation should it be required.

Ms CARNEY: I do not recall seeing the words 'free rein to do anything' in the inquiry's terms of reference. I will move from this shortly, but I think it is open for others to conclude there is what amounts to inertia on the part of the government in this area, and it is just hoping that around about September answers will appear. That is very disappointing.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, answers will not appear in September. What will appear in September will be the results of the inquiry and the recommendations. Answers will be given from this government; the only government in the past seven years has done something about children services in the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Let us talk about caseloads, because caseloads has come up in the well known coronial investigations, report after report, estimates in the past, and I would like to see whether anything much has changed. You would know in one of the coronial inquests one case worker gave evidence that she had 118 cases on her books. Others have acknowledged caseloads were in the area of 70 or 80, and that was about average. I believe you predecessor publicly acknowledged that was so for some case workers.

Has the department set benchmarks for caseloads for workers?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: The department has not put in place caseload benchmarks at this time.

Mr VATSKALIS: On 1 November 2009 my advice is the average caseload for staff members was between 22 and 25 cases, which I considered to be extremely high when you see caseloads in other jurisdictions between 12 and 15 cases. On saying that, I have qualified what they do in other states is different to what we are doing here, and the response times are different.

Ms CARNEY: In November 2009 you thought ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that was the advice I received.

Ms CARNEY: ... caseloads should be ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It was 22 to 25.

Ms CARNEY: Was or should be?

Mr VATSKALIS: Between 22 and 25 was the average caseload. You can say one person had 10 and the other had 40, divide it by two and it makes 25. Again, it depends on the area and the number of notifications.

Ms CARNEY: In an e-mail dated 26 October 2009, which we obtained under freedom of information, when asked a question by Katrina Bolton at the ABC about caseloads, a staffer from the fifth floor wrote the answer as follows: 'We are looking into caseloads in the department. We are looking at caseload formulas in other jurisdictions to see what would be appropriate. Off the record, the average caseload in other jurisdictions is around 20 to 35'.

Minister, you said caseloads of 22 to 25 are too high. What are you aiming at?

Mr VATSKALIS: The caseload 12 to 15, case by case, working for child protection investigations is widely recognised as the best management tool. In Tasmania it is about 10 to 12, and in Queensland it is 15 cases per case worker. Our aim is to be somewhere around the Queensland number. I cannot guarantee it will be the same considering we have many remote cases - we might be a bit higher. Certainly, I do not envisage it to be more than 13, but I cannot - however the employment of 64 new workers will bring caseload numbers down.

Ms CARNEY: I want to ask you some questions about the additional workers. Should we be concerned benchmarks are not set given Jenny Scott last year, and probably the year before, said the department is working on it? Yes, the department is working on setting benchmarks, but no benchmarks are set. I would be concerned about that if I were the minister. Are you?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can set benchmarks and never match them, because they are unrealistic. What I want to see is, actually, a realistic approach to working cases. Every person is not going to be overwhelmed with 50, 60 caseloads when somebody else can actually have only 10. I have said to Clare she is free to move people from one region to another, and she has done it recently to two people in Tennant Creek where the caseloads were low, and took them to Katherine where the caseloads were really high, in order to bring the caseload down in Katherine.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I did have some other questions, but time is against us. I would like to talk about the staff increases that you have referred to. Much has been made of – well, there are constant references from government about the \$14.6m, \$14.7m allocations in this budget, but not all of that \$14m-odd is for the child protection services, as you know.

In your budget day media release, you said it was \$1.35m for additional child protection workers and

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to expand services for children in care. I have a couple of questions in relation to that \$1.35m. Is all of that \$1.35m for, specifically, additional child protection workers?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I just need to ensure I am referring to the same figures. Could you just clarify where you are sourcing that?

Ms CARNEY: Budget day media release, which I will just check for you. Yes, page 3, media release. I am happy just to flick you over - you have the copy, Clare, of that media release?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes. Supporting families budget paper?

Ms CARNEY: 'Delivering better health services now for Territory families'. The one with the tab with the dollar sign on the page, which I thought was an ingenious way to mark the media release.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: So, a breakdown of that is \$.3m to provide three additional child protection workers, one located in Katherine, and two in Alice Springs ...

Ms CARNEY: So one Katherine, one Alice. Sorry, how many Katherine?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: One in Katherine and two in Alice.

Ms CARNEY: Two in Alice, yes.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: ... \$0.2m to provide two additional therapeutic service workers, one in Darwin, one in Alice Springs; \$0.35m to meet the operational costs of providing residential care to some of the children in care of the Chief Executive.

Ms CARNEY: If you have that in tabled form, would you be willing to table it?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I think I have a copy that can be tabled. Yes, \$0.5m is the remainder and that is an allocation of funding to assist additional cost associated with providing care and services for the children in the care of the CE.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, out of the four components that you have mentioned, I have \$0.3m - in other words \$300 000 - for extra workers, one in Katherine, two in Alice Springs. Correct?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: That is right.

Ms CARNEY: How on earth, minister, do you get 76 extra child care workers from an allocation of \$300 000, \$0.3m? That is the final wash-up. So, that is what we have discovered. After all of the spin, we have \$300 000 for three child protection workers in the Northern Territory? Even I did not think it was that bad.

Mr VASTSKALIS: Actually, of the \$14.6m, \$6m will go for placement options for children in care ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr VASTSKALIS: ... \$3m will go for additional child protection officers and associate support staff ...

Ms CARNEY: Hang on. What was that? \$3m?

Mr VASTSKALIS: Yes.

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Ms CARNEY: \$3m for extra child protection and support staff.

Mr VASTSKALIS: Yes. Now ...

Ms CARNEY: So, where was that \$300 000 coming from?

Mr VASTSKALIS: Hold on, I have not finished yet. \$850 000 will go to additional child protection workers - that is \$300 000, expand therapeutic service team, that is \$200 000, and the residential care unit, that is \$350 000. Then there will \$300 000 to expand the Child Abuse Task Force with three extra people. Then they have \$500 000 to meet the additional costs associated with the care services for children in care. So, when you add all of it, actually there is even more. There will be \$1.5m for group home accommodation in Alice Springs. There will be \$600 000 for after hours response ...

Ms CARNEY: No, we are in Child Protection Services, that output, so I am after, and you know where I am going. I have \$3m, so I am just after the child protection group allocation. \$3m, plus \$850 000, yes?

Mr VASTSKALIS: I assume that that actually responds to youths on the streets of Alice Springs is child protection ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, it is a separate output in the budget, minister.

Mr VASTSKALIS: That is true - and establish crisis short-term accommodation for young people in Palmerston is actually part of the child protection ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, yes, yes, I know all – you were the one - I mean, there has been much said about the creation of 76, your words not mine, 76 extra people in the child protection system, so it is that that I am wanting to ask you questions about.

Mr VASTSKALIS: We have 32 additional child protection officers.

MS CARNEY: Sorry, say again?

Mr VASTSKALIS: We have 32 additional child protection officers. Fourteen continue development funding of culturally secure Aboriginal child protection ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, 32 child protection officers?

Mr VASTSKALIS: Fourteen to continue the development and funding of culturally secure Aboriginal Child Protection and Family Support Services. Five additional child protection workers ...

Ms CARNEY: So, in the 32, or plus?

Mr VASTSKALIS: No, that is 32, plus 14, plus five, plus ...

Ms CARNEY: No, the 14 were not child protection workers, minister.

Mr VASTSKALIS: They were full time equivalent working in child protection.

Ms CARNEY: You said 14.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: These are all personnel working within the child protection area.

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Ms CARNEY: Hang on, can we just back up, because I think we are at cross purposes. I have, in this year's budget, \$3m for child protection workers and support workers in the area of child protection services. I have also got \$850 000 for additional child protection workers, yes?

Mr VATSKALIS: Five full-time equivalent.

Ms CARNEY: So \$850 000 is for five FTEs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. And \$1.5m for 14 of these to community development and funding of culturally secure Aboriginal Child Protection and Family Support Services. Then I have \$300 000 for three FTEs to expand the Child Abuse Task Force.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I want to get to how many new child protection workers will be employed, with how much, from your budget? So we have 32 additional child protection officers. Is that going to be in the first 12 months, or is it over a period of time, if so, how long?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is in the budget ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We have commenced a recruitment process for the full 76 officers.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, I will put that in. Could you table that document? You have indicated that you would, so I do not think we have - thank you. Yes. So, you have advertised.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We are in the process now.

Ms CARNEY: I am really racing through this because of time, and we might just go a couple of minutes over 10:30.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Also, Gerry has some questions.

Ms CARNEY: I don't consent to Gerry having questions, really.

Mr Wood: If you run over time that is not my problem.

Ms CARNEY: Well, you are a horrible, little man.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order, member for Araluen!

Ms CARNEY: Child protection workers – you have used the term Child Protection Officers. That is a change in terminology. I would like to know, and this is important, and I would like you to allay some of the concerns that I feel certain you know are in this area. There is a concern that child protection is going to be de-professionalised, and that is a very serious matter. I can really assure you that people are talking about this and they are worried. So, how many of the new positions will be social workers trained to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Clare to take this.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. And if you have a tabled document, that would be great.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Of the 76 new positions that have been announced in the budget, two of those will be professional positions in Darwin. Three professional positions relate to child protection services, three are professional positions in Darwin related to out of home care. We have ...

Ms CARNEY: So that is a total of five?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Five. We have eight positions in Central Australia related to child protection and out-of-home care. There are three professional positions in Katherine related to child protection and out-of-home care. So, that is a total of 16 professional staff.

Ms CARNEY: Should I be concerned, and should those interested in child protection be concerned, that out of a promise of 76, there are only 16 new professional staff?

Mr VATSKALIS: From the 76, 64 will be frontline staff, and not all frontline staff has to be professional. To give you an example, we have actually put (inaudible) health we have six extra people working in environmental health. Of the six people, two are professionals, university graduates, and the other will be support staff working in environmental health under the guidance of the professionals. Not everyone has to be a professional in the front line. Some of them will not be university qualified but they have other qualifications appropriate to (inaudible) but will be under the guidance and control of professional people. Clare can expand more on that.

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you. I don't need that – you have answered that. I am going to invite the member for Macdonnell to ask a question. But, before doing so, I, and others, I am sure, remain concerned by what we have seen and by what you have said. Because it is evident the system is in crisis and has not coped with the professional staff it already has, and I wonder about how it will cope when you have such a disproportionate number of non-professional staff injected into the system.

Mr VATSKALIS: I know it is not child protection. Let me give you an example. We have made inroads in health in Indigenous communities by utilising not nurses, because we cannot find them, but by using Aboriginal Health Workers. Some of this staff will be Aboriginal Child Protection Workers and that is very important. As the member for Macdonnell said before, I would rather use an Aboriginal Child Protection Worker than a white fellow working in the clinic who thinks he or she knows the language and the culture. We are going to employ both professionals, university graduates but, in order to make inroads in child protection in remote areas and Aboriginal communities, we have and we should and we will employ properly qualified, Indigenous people, or we will train Indigenous people to address these issues.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We do have a training strategy in place to upgrade para-professionals who are working, particularly, in remote communities to work towards a diploma level qualification. So, they have a career pathway which bridges the gap, so that at a point in time they too can become an authorised officer under the *Child Protection Act*.

Ms CARNEY: That is good but, I remain, nevertheless, concerned, and let us revisit it next year, about the lack of expertise in this area so needing of expertise.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Is this the same? 1.2?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I would like to ask a question in 1.4.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Macdonnell, do you have a 1.2 question?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes. Minister, can you clarify for me, in the case I have spoke about, whether the evidence, because of the department using the wrong interpreter for the nine year-old child, will not be contaminated?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot because I do not have the information yet, but I will invite you during the

break to provide us with the information and we will investigate it. Without having all the information, we cannot respond to that. But, again, in about 10 minutes time we have a break, please come and give us all this information and we will instigate action immediately.

Ms ANDERSON: Another question, minister, have you got any data of interpreters in other cases that has been used against the child's first language? So, have you got information about whether interpreters were used, and maybe the wrong interpreter was used?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: We do have a project in train at the moment to improve cultural security, which includes the improved use of interpreter services in remote and other communities across the Territory. I am not aware if we are able to provide detailed data, but if we are able to I am happy to provide it to you.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you. And, minister, just on the training of Indigenous frontline workers on remote Aboriginal communities, in appointing these people to work in remote Aboriginal communities have we taken into consideration the sensitivities of certain people working in communities who cannot report even their own families.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, it is a conflict of interest because they are living and breathing and are family members in their own community. It is a real issue we are aware of in dealing with child protection matters. Much of the work we are hoping to use the Indigenous workers for is for family support processes rather than the statutory intervention where a decision is made to remove a child. In addition, we have in place the Indigenous Practice Advisor to assist in making those complex decisions.

Mr VATSKALIS: Our position is not to remove children it is how to support families, and I think we are moving in that direction. Physically remove a child - how to keep the family together is the hard part, and that is what we are planning to do.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, on the Torres Strait Islander principle we have, are we as a department taking the step of looking after the culture rather than the protection of children?

Mr VATSKALIS: The protection of children is paramount. We prefer to keep children with their family, but only if the children are safe. That applies not only to Indigenous communities; it applies to any community in the Territory. It does not matter what the culture or ethnic background is, the first thing we have to think of is the safety of the child. However, it is fundamental a child stays with the family, and Indigenous families are extended families and there are plenty of people there. However, if we cannot find a place to put the child in a safe environment we will not place the child. Again, it is important to support the family, and the extended family, so the child will be safe.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Out of Home Care Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now move to Output 1.3, Out of Home Care Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: None because of time restraints.

Ms ANDERSON: Can the minister confirm foster carers who receive the foster carer allowance are also able to receive an allowance to cover day care, or babysitting costs, whilst they go to work?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, that is correct.

Ms ANDERSON: Can we have some information on how many foster carers receive that, and at what cost to the department?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: I have a figure in front of me which is the July 2009 to 30 April 2010 cost of children in care where the department is purchasing childcare or after school services of \$863 000.

Ms ANDERSON: Can we have that tabled? Does that incorporate the total cost to government for additional payments we pay to foster carers?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is included in the Out of Home Care budget allocation.

Ms ANDERSON: Specifically identifying - because in that document you would have the allocation to foster carers. I want the allocation of extra to. If these foster carers are going to work, then they bring in babysitters to mind the children?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Yes, the figure I read out was on top of foster carer allowances, payments are made to cover the costs of childcare and after school fee services in addition to foster care payments.

Ms ANDERSON: Can I have that tabled?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions on Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 - Youth Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now move to Output 1.4, Youth Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in February 2008 government announced various measures under the Youth Justice Family Responsibility Amendment Bill. There was a blaze of publicity, and government made all sorts of promises such as by way of media release 13 February the Auditor-General said:

Family Responsibility Agreements to hold parents accountable for their child's antisocial behaviour or criminal activity. The contractual agreements will require parents to better monitor their children and may require parents to attend counselling or guidance programs.

I know you are expecting these questions. How many family responsibility agreements have been made in 2009-10?

Mr VATSKALIS: In 2009-10, we had 12 family responsibility agreements involving 28 people.

Ms CARNEY: How many in Alice, how many in Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were two in Darwin involving four people, six in Palmerston involving 12 people, and four in Alice Springs involving 12 people.

Ms CARNEY: O course, this was the campaign that ran publicly with glossy brochures, radio advertising and I think I recall some stuff in the newspaper. Last year was unspectacular with six family responsibility agreements. This year is a little less unspectacular with 12. How many family responsibility orders have been made – and, of course, you will remember the blaze of publicity that accompanied comments made or the policy of the government at the time, where parents would face court-imposed family responsibility orders and so on? How many orders were made in 2009-10?

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember the family responsibility agreements are a voluntary plan; it is not something the government punishes people with. It is actually people who seek assistance from the government departments and we provide it. There have been no inquiries of family circumstances this financial year because families are currently receiving support and guidance from the family support centre. We do not need the criteria for consideration prior to an order being made and, as a result, no orders have been issued this year.

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Ms CARNEY: Okay, no orders. How many fines were issued under the legislation in 2009-10, and what was the value of those fines?

Mr VATSKALIS: Zero.

Ms CARNEY: No fines were issued?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Ms CARNEY: So, that is another failure. So, no orders. This is what we are getting at: government promises much, delivers little. How many TVs were seized?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, member for Araluen, it sounds good and probably good media to say 'zero, zero, zero', but the reality is ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, it sounded really good when you guys introduced your legislation and used taxpayers' dollars to flog it to everybody.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: Are you interested in listening to the answer or not?

Ms CARNEY: I am very interested to listen to the answer, and I am sure other people are as well. Nil, in terms of fines issued. Next question: how many TVs were seized?

Mr VATSKALIS: It makes very good media to stand up and grandstand, but the reality is the FRAs are actually a voluntary mechanism for families, if they have problems with their children, to enter into a voluntary agreement.

Ms CARNEY: FRAs, of course, they are agreements. My question is about orders. You said there were no orders had been made.

Mr VATSKALIS: There were no orders. Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Let us move on. Fines, there were none. How many goods were seized and what was the value of goods seized in 2009-10?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were no goods seized because ...

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Thank you, minister, time is against us. We have done pretty well, 10.29 am. Thank you very much indeed for coming along, and I guess there is a break.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, member for Araluen,.

Ms CARNEY: I am done.

Mr WOOD: You know there is not a break.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have questions to Output 1.4?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I do, Mr Chairman, as much as we get ignored, sometimes.

Minister, in relation to Youth Services, you provide money for three youth camps, Tangentyere

Council in Alice Springs, Brahminy Foundation and Balunu Foundation in the Top End ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Can you give us what financial assistance you have given them over the last three years? You may not have given them over the entire last few years, because the money started flowing into these providers the year before the election. How often do these organisations report to the Northern Territory government? Any idea how many camps were run, how many youth attended and, because you put money into these providers, do you see the outcomes where you can show us kids going through these organisations are not getting caught up in criminal activities or other neo-criminal activities later on?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, member for Nelson, it is a very important question. The Country Liberals want a boot camp; they want to punish the children if they make a mistake. We are actually trying to help children not to repeat the mistake. We have all been young, we all made mistakes in our lives, but I think a boot camp is the extreme. With the services of a youth camp we offer through Tangentyere, Brahminy and Balunu children have an opportunity to discover themselves and self-correct their behaviour. We have about \$1m for these camps. We had immediate success with the three camps. In the reporting period we have, we have 38 participants attending the Tangentyere youth camp, 10 the Ramingining youth camp, and none in Balunu, and that was a reporting period 1 July 2009 to 30 April 2010.

The number of participants since March 2008 is really a good indication, about 56 in Tangentyere; in Ramingining we had 20, and 86 in Balunu. Now, we actually have seen it changed a lot of children coming out of these youth camps, being engaged in the community, in a positive way, not a negative way, and now we are getting a consultant to do a review of the effectiveness of these camps, how well they operate, and what would be a tangible outcome of those camps.

Mr WOOD: And when do you expect that consultant to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We expect to get the outcome at the end of 2010.

Mr WOOD: I have a question for Output 1.5, if that is all right to do.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions to Output 1.4, member for Macdonnell? That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

Output 1.5 – Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now move to Output 1.5, Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: Minister, how many of the 20 safe places, 15 remote and two urban you established are still functioning? How many people use the facilities? How many of the facilities have phone facilities? And, how many staff are allocated to each facility?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Twenty of the safe places are in operation at this point in time across 15 remote communities, so the last safe place opened their operation in March of this year. At this stage, we have year to date data that 89 local people were employed to operate the safe places, that includes full-time and casual staff. At this stage, accessing the number of safe places, we have 360 women, with 304 accompanying children, and 34 men.

Mr WOOD: How many men there?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Thirty-four.

Mr WOOD: All right. I have a fairly broad question but, what professional staff - this is relating to page 88 of your annual report – maybe it was answered before, but I will just – you can tell me.

What professional staff are permanently attached to the mobile outreach services which the Australian government funds. Could you list the communities and town camp visits, and the number of visits? How do you measure the success of the service? Is the funding running out in 2010-11, and will you continue to fund this service?

Mr VATSKALIS: The service provided by region from 1 July 2009 to 30 April 2010. Central Australia - 19 clients, 93 events, 107 community meetings, 22 community education and five professional development. In the Barkly, three clients, three events, 43 community meetings, nine community education, one professional development. In the Katherine region, six clients, 17 events, 124 community meetings, eight community education, and eight professional development. In the Top End, 45 clients, 167 events, 259 community visits, 18 education, and 11 professional development.

Mr WOOD: Okay. And the question is, will funding continue after 2010-11, and who will provide that funding?

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: At this stage, there is no funding committed beyond that time.

Mr WOOD: This is not another CDEP matter where ...

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: It is Australian government funded, the initiative.

Mr WOOD: That is what worried me, that go into an agreement where they expect you to pick up the tab afterwards.

Ms GARDINER-BARNES: Not at this stage. We are yet to negotiate ongoing funding.

Mr WOOD: Okay. We will have a continual watch, a brief on what is happening there. That concludes my questioning.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 1.5.

Output 1.6 – Children’s Commissioner

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions to 1.6, Children’s Commissioner? No. In that case, we conclude consideration of NT Families and Children, thank you very much.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ACUTE SERVICES

Mr CHAIRMAN: Welcome back. Minister, would you like to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you. Mr Chairman. I would like to introduce my acting CEO, Alan Wilson, Helen Mason, Acting Director, Acute Care Division, and David Ryan, CFO.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We want one clarification, you indicated you would take questions on ambulances at this section, is it in Output 2.1?

Mr VATSKALIS: Ambulances, yes. 2.2.

Ms PURICK: Chairman, what about the aero-medical service, where does that sit?

Mr WOOD: 2.1.

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask a question about the broader appropriation for health. Is that going to fall into this? I know the member for Araluen, closed off non specific ...

A Person Unknown: That was generic.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Non output specific was right at the end. Member for Araluen was agency specific. Minister, do you mind if we do Agency Specific (Whole of Government Related Questions) now?

Mr CONLAN: Is that non-specific output?

Mr CHAIRMAN: At the very end there is a catch-all which we can do it. We can do it either way.

Mr VATSKALIS: When we started we were asked are the question generic for the agency, they said no. Why are we going back?

Mr CHAIRMAN: There are two options, the non-output specific budget questions, which we are going to get to, they can ask those questions then. The question is whether you want them then or now.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we can do them. Let us go to the output.

Output 2.1 – Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are at Output 2.1.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the budget allocations for our various hospitals - and I will stay with Alice Springs and Darwin for the moment - what is the over-run for Alice Springs hospital and Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr RYAN: At this stage we are not looking at an over-run for the department, we are looking to contain all possible expenditure this financial year.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, no over-run for Alice Springs or Darwin Hospital, is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: As the Chief Financial Officer said, we are trying to contain ...

Mr RYAN: As an agency as a whole we are appropriated to cover all services, and at this stage we are planning to come in on budget this financial year. Any internal divisional over runs would be met internally.

Mr CONLAN: The \$245m allocated for Royal Darwin hospital last year, you are going to come in at or under that figure, is that right?

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: For Alice Springs as well? Minister, \$118m was allocated last year for Alice Springs hospital, are you telling me you will come in at that figure or under that figure by the end of the financial year?

Mr RYAN: What we report on externally is admitted patients and non-admitted patients as an output as the whole. It includes more than just the hospitals, so what we are saying is, as a department, we

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will manage our funds to meet all outputs.

Mr CONLAN: However, \$118m was allocated for Alice Springs hospital in 2009-10, and this year it is \$129m. The running and management of Alice Springs hospital will come in under or at \$118m.

Mr RYAN: As a hospital they may come in slightly over, but as a department we will cover that.

Mr CONLAN: That was my original question. What is the overrun for the Alice Springs Hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: The argument here is that planning for health is something you cannot plan. You only need a event to actually blow your budget away. For example, last year we had the swine flu epidemic, during which the Alice Springs Hospital had to admit so many people into intensive care the budget actually went over the top. However, the overall budget with departments is well known. The overall budget for all the hospitals is known. As the CFO said, we are going to maintain that budget, we are not going to be able to run over on that budget. However, there will be internal reallocation of funding to cover it, even if there is an overrun in one hospital or another.

I know you have asked this question before, which gives me the suspicion that your party's platform here is to cut the overrun of any hospital, not allowing the hospital to blow a budget. Irrespective, there are going to be certain circumstances which leads me to be really worried about what you would do if you had government.

One of the best ways to actually control the overrun - and I have seen in the past twice - is cut staff down. Cut nurses like you did in 1996, 1999, with the CRESAP, and Planning for Growth. There are really alarm bells ringing about the intention of your party if it comes to government, and what it is going to do with health.

Mr CONLAN: Thanks for that, minister. Essentially, what is the overrun for the Alice Springs Hospital? Mr Ryan has indicated that it might come in slightly over. Regardless of that stale rhetoric that we continue to hear - we hear a lot of this in the Chamber. This is estimates, so if we can get to the specific question.

Alice Springs Hospital in 2009-10 was allocated \$118m for the operation of Alice Springs Hospital. Mr Ryan has indicated it might come in slightly over that by the end of this financial year. Can you please indicate how much over that it might come in?

Mr RYAN: Just to clarify, the budget for Alice Springs Hospital is actually about \$127m for 2009-10. They may go slightly over, but we would be talking about 1% to 2%, possibly.

Mr CONLAN: Well, in a last year's media release, you stated the allocation of Alice Springs Hospital was \$118m.

Mr RYAN: That would have been based on the budget data known at the time of publishing the 2009-10 budget. During the financial year, we would have a whole heap of arrangements that would increase that budget, either through extended Commonwealth agreements or additional initiative funding coming from the NT government.

Mr CONLAN: You are saying that you allocated \$118m last year and, for some unforeseen circumstances, it has pushed it out by an extra - what did you say it was? - \$127m?

Mr RYAN: The budget would move the specific funding agreements, where we have had increases to our funding, that the budget to the hospital would have moved. It is now \$127m.

Mr CONLAN: For 2009-10 or 2010-11?

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Mr RYAN: For 2009-10.

Mr VATSKALIS: And similar things may happen in 2011-12. For example, there are agreements with the federal government that provide extra funding for the hospital. That extra funding will appear in the budget and, at the end of the year, will be higher than what we allocated. It happens to all outputs.

Mr CONLAN: Is it a similar situation with Royal Darwin Hospital? It was allocated \$245m in 2009-10 in the budget, in your budget media release. Now, we see \$292m. So, what is the potential overrun there for the Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr RYAN: Again you have a similar situation. It is not an overrun, but it is an actual adjustment to the budget. The budget has now moved to \$273m for the financial year ...

Mr CONLAN: \$273m?

Mr RYAN: The increases there are specific to Commonwealth agreements that are put in place during the financial year, and with the commencement of some NT fund admissions such as the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre. It commenced in March. There are specific NT funding that comes in with that - radiation, oncology ...

Mr CONLAN: But their radiation oncology unit is a Commonwealth-funded initiative fought very vigorously by my colleague here as the former member for Solomon.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a good spin!

Mr CONLAN: Well, as much as you would like to spin it the other way, the facts do speak for themselves. It was ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Let me remind you the oncology unit was built by the Rudd government which provided \$27m, not \$13m. It is the oncology unit to which you have been invited three times but you did not even bother to turn up to see it.

Mr RYAN: Can we also make the point that the Commonwealth funding was for the capital development, rather than actual operations.

Mr TOLLNER: Really? You get no money from Medicare, you get no ongoing support ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Fong Lim, you do not have the call.

Mr CONLAN: We can take the issue of did not bother to turn up at another time. I think that is a bit of a low blow. Nevertheless, Mr Ryan did indicate that there might be a significant overrun, or rather a significant or insignificant overrun, with regard to the Alice Springs Hospital. What I am asking is, what is that figure?

Mr VATSKALIS: He did not indicate a significant overrun ...

Mr CONLAN: He just said it.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... he indicated a possible 1% to 2%. That is not a significant overrun in a budget of \$127m. Would you like us to stop treating people with renal dialysis because we are over the budget? Would you like to tell people from remote communities coming in to be treated because we are over budget? Well, we are not. You probably do, but this government is not.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, that is not the point. The point is, what we are trying to find out ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is the point.

Mr CONLAN: It is not the point. If there is are significant, or rather extra services that are required by these hospitals, the point is, and what we are asking here is, how come they were not foreseen at the beginning?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, we could not foresee the swine flu epidemic. We could not foresee the influx of people from other jurisdictions to Alice Springs for renal dialysis. Unless you have got a crystal ball and you can manage to see into the future, I cannot tell what is going to happen tomorrow.

Mr CONLAN: So, essentially minister then, the budget for Alice Springs Hospital is announced at \$118m, it has now come in at what, \$127m?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thanks to the Australian government for putting in money for programs that they can be incorporated into the budget.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, now do you have a list of those Commonwealth initiatives that you say has pushed that out to an extra \$11m?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr RYAN: For the admitted patients, the additional Commonwealth funded programs I can give you are: \$4m for the elective surgery waitlist; \$1.2m for organ and tissue donation; and, \$500 000 for highly specialised drugs. But the key area here is, the Northern Territory government has actually funded quite a bit of money through the, as I said before, the Alan Walker Cancer Clinic, and also nursing hours per patient day, and that has amounted to about \$16.4m.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so I will just add that up. That is \$5.2m - \$5.7m. \$5.7m is what the Commonwealth initiatives have pushed that out, but that does not ... \$120 minus \$127 is a lot more than \$5.7m.

Mr RYAN: There was also an additional increase to the budget for Commonwealth programs carried forward from last year as well, they were incomplete for 2008-09.

Mr CONLAN: So, minister, what ...

Mr RYAN: \$5.5m.

Mr CONLAN: So, minister, what programs were they?

Mr RYAN: \$3m for the trauma centre, \$720 000 for activity-based funding ...

Mr CONLAN: No, I am talking about the Alice Springs Hospital here.

Mr RYAN: These relate to admitted patients across the board, so across all hospitals.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but I am trying to break it down per hospital, if you see what I am ...

Mr RYAN: The data we pull together for Estimates is based on outputs rather than on a hospital. We do not report externally on hospitals.

Mr CONLAN: So you do not have a breakdown of how much it costs to run the Alice Springs Hospital or the Royal Darwin Hospital? I do not see why it is such a complicated question.

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Mr RYAN: We have actually told you the budgets for RDH and Alice Springs Hospital. If you want a breakdown of the movements between the budget period and where we are now, they can be provided, it is just not what we have come prepared for at Estimates, which is base amounts.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not per hospital, it is per scenario.

Mr RYAN: Can I point out that Alice Springs Hospital ...

Members interjecting.

Mr CONLAN: Far be it from me to think health involves hospitals. I mean ...

Mr RYAN: Alice Springs Hospital and RDH would go across admitted and non-admitted patients. So whilst I have given you the admitted patients increases, there would be increases also for non-admitted patients.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so let us put it this way, how much has it cost to operate and manage the Alice Springs Hospital up until this point in time from the last financial year?

Mr RYAN: You want to know what the budget is for Alice Springs Hospital?

Mr CONLAN: What I want is actually cost, not what you budgeted, what it has actually come in at, as of now.

Mr RYAN: The cost, as to what, the expenditure to the end of April for Alice Springs Hospital is \$104m.

Mr CONLAN: At?

Mr RYAN: To the end of April.

Mr CONLAN: To the end of April - \$104m. And the Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr RYAN: Royal Darwin Hospital is \$216m.

Mr VATSKALIS: Which clearly indicates there is not an overrun on the budget for Alice Springs or the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr CONLAN: At this stage. Minister, how is it that you have put an extra \$48m towards Royal Darwin Hospital and \$11m towards the Alice Springs Hospital if we are running so efficiently?

Mr RYAN: Could you please clarify?

Mr CONLAN: To the minister, Mr Ryan. If we are running at such efficiencies as you are saying, \$104m for Alice Springs and \$216m for RDH at the end of April, you thrown in an extra \$50m towards the operation of Royal Darwin Hospital, and \$11m to the Alice Springs Hospital.

Mr RYAN: Again, the funding that has come in is based on particular agreements or initiatives which have resulted in a change of service or a continuation of something that was previously funded.

Mr CONLAN: Can you explain that? What does that mean?

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Mr RYAN: With particular Commonwealth agreements they are time limited, and we will only include in our budget preparations what we have up to the end of that agreement; as those agreements are renewed or varied, we will vary the budget.

Mr CONLAN: So, minister, I am not too proud to say that I get lost with bureau-speak, so can you please explain that in laymen's terms, as the minister, what that means?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will tell you very simply, over the course of 2009-10 there has been a nett increase in the admit patient out, but we are talking about outputs, not hospitals, in the estimates. In the admit patient out we have \$23m caused by release of funding for NT initiatives: \$6m for the Alan Walker Cancer Centre; \$7.6m for the Nursing Hours per Patient Day, the hospital staffing model; \$2.6m for RDH's emergency power generation: an additional fee for service revenue, so \$4.4m for cross-border patients; \$1m for WA beds, the ones the Western Australia government has bought and they pay to Darwin, and the agreements signed with the Western Australian has \$4m for elective surgery wait lists reduction, and \$1.2m for organ and tissue donations.

There is significant money flowing from the federal government and incorporated in the admitted patients output.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I just need to clear up why you say that admitted patient care and non -admitted or acute services as a whole, does not include hospitals?

Mr VATSKALIS: It does. Unfortunately, it is spread out between the admitted and non admitted. This is estimates, we are looking at outputs, not in hospitals, not in the emergency departments singularly, not in remote clinics, and we are looking at outputs admitted and non-admitted. And the hospitals are both admitted and non-admitted patients.

Mr CONLAN: That is right, so I am simply asking about money allocated for these hospitals and where we are tracking at the moment, and you have given me a figure of \$104m as of the 1 April, and \$216m for Royal Darwin Hospital. My question is: you have allocated an extra \$48m for Royal Darwin Hospital, and \$11m for Alice Springs Hospital, that is rather a significant injection into these hospitals which appear, by your figures, to be running quite efficiently - if they are running so efficiently, why the significant injection of funds to them?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are running efficiently. They are the busiest hospitals in Australia ...

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, minister, I did not hear. Did you say they are the most efficient hospitals in the country?

Mr VATSKALIS: They are the busiest hospitals in Australia. Now you are the one who says that we are spending the money and where are the outputs? I will tell you were the outputs are – 200 000 beds being admitted to the Royal Darwin Hospital last year, nearly the whole population; one person every 10 minutes in the Emergency Department. We have significant pressure in renal dialysis and we admit that pressure, that is where the efficiencies in the outputs are, that is where the money is translated.

Mr CONLAN: So, minister, are you able to provide the actually financial statements of the Alice Springs and Royal Darwin Hospitals to the committee?

Mr RYAN: We do not produce financial statements for individual programs, we produce a financial statement for the agency as a whole, and that is available in the annual report.

Mr CONLAN: You do not produce a statement for the hospital?

Mr RYAN: No, it forms a part of the agency and, as such, we prepare financial statements on the agency as a whole and that is available in the annual report.

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Mr CONLAN: So you do not produce a statement for the hospital?

Mr RYAN: No, it forms a part of the agency and as such we prepare financial statements on their ...

Mr CONLAN: So how do you know then that it is running at – the actual cost of the individual hospitals?

Mr RYAN: We do produce internal expenditure reports for hospitals, which is what I have quoted from.

Mr CONLAN: Will you be able to table that report to this committee? How much it costs to run the hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have a problem with that.

Mr CONLAN: Beg your pardon?

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have a problem, we can table it.

Mr RYAN: Just a point of clarification though, when we are talking about hospital budgets, because we do not report our hospitals externally, and you are talking about movements from a point in time, sometime in the past, within admitted patients there is a whole – and in the division of Acute Care there is a budget provided - and that budget can be varied throughout the year with just internal distribution of funds as it is deemed appropriate, where the demand is. They may not distribute all of the budget to the hospital specifically back in May 2009, but subsequent decisions made by the Executive would push more funding out to the hospitals. But it was included in the base budget for admitted patients or non-admitted patients.

That is just trying to explain the disparity between the output funding that is moved and the hospital funding that is moved by a different figure.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but you will table that information for us?

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the Acute Services budget for 2009-10 was \$602.328m yet the estimate was \$631m, so that is a difference of \$29.317m. Are you able to account or explain the difference?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will have to refer it to David.

Mr RYAN: As admitted patients, over the things we have quoted earlier, because we are in the one that is Admitted Patients, the figure is across both admitted and non-admitted patients. So for Admitted Patients it is an extra \$16.4m from the Northern Territory government. That was \$5.8m for the Alan Walker Cancer Care Centre; \$7.6m to implement Nursing Hours per Patient Day; \$2.6m for the RDH emergency power generation; and \$400 000 for the Top End Aeromedical contract fee.

We have an additional \$7.2m on fee for service and I think we provided these figures before, but I am happy to read through them again if you desire:

\$4.4m - across border patients; \$0.9m for WA beds; \$0.4m for additional rental received; \$1.5m for sundry fee for service arrangements; \$5.7m additional funding from the Australian government; \$4m for elective surgery wait lists; \$1.2m for organ tissue donation; \$0.5m for highly specialised drugs; \$2.1m funding carried forward which is Australian government funding carried forward from 2008-09

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and that was \$1.8m for highly specialised drugs, \$0.4m for specialist training programs and \$0.2 for quality programs.

We also had some negatives as well where we transferred money to a balance sheet to invest in capital, \$300 000 for elective surgery wait list, asset acquisitions; \$240 000 for sub-acute care and Emergency Department; and an extra \$90 000 for radiation oncology equipment. We have subsequently made some call on Australian government programs which are not going to be completed in 2009-10 and we have rolled them forward into 2010-11. There is \$3m going from the Trauma Centre; \$720 000 for the activity-based funding; \$44 000 for the National Blood Authority; \$620 000 for organ tissue donation; \$520 000 for quality programs; \$180 000 for Cancer Net; and \$29 000 for Emergency Department.

Mr RYAN: That would equate to the \$22m that the output has gone up.

Mr CONLAN: It is actually \$29.317m.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I just wanted the figures for both acute and non-acute.

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: All right. So the ...

Mr CONLAN: Hang on. I have just heard three figures. Sorry. I have said \$29.317m, which is the difference between the budget and the estimate ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, because that includes having ...

Mr CONLAN: Then, I heard \$16m and, now, I have heard \$22m.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no, hold on. David is quite right. \$22m variations for the admitted patient services, and \$6.3m is for the non-admitted patient services. So, \$29m ...

Mr CONLAN: So what was the \$16m though? What was the \$16m figure?

Mr RYAN: Sorry, the NT government initiatives; is that what you are after there? That was the \$16m of the \$22m.

Mr VATSKALIS: On the admitted patient services.

Mr RYAN: Yes. The breakdown of the \$16m I can give again, which is ...

Mr CONLAN: No, no, that is okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: So, the \$29m you are referring to is both admitted and non-admitted cases. Okay? Let us make it clear.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is clear. All that, then, adds up to \$29.317m. Is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, approximately.

Mr CONLAN: Approximately.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: All right. You need to be more specific ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, I can be more specific. You have \$22.988m plus \$6.329m. If you add it, probably you are right.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, well, I would like to know whether or not it is the actual figure, though, minister? I think that is fair enough. \$29.317, is that what it equates to?

Mr RYAN: \$29m is the output group.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, for the output.

Mr VATSKALIS: \$29.317m.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Okay, are you able to table that breakdown for us?

Mr WILSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you mind just for Hansard, identifying yourself.

Mr WILSON: Indeed, sorry. Alan Wilson, Acting Chief Executive. Just a question around the document we are tabling. I have just been advised we are very happy to do that as a question on notice, but we just need a bit of clarification on a couple of things. Is it the budget movement from 2009-10 to the budget in 2010-11 that you are interested in?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If we are going to a question on notice, member for Greatorex, I did not actually have it down as a question on notice. Are we going to use a question on notice, do you mind actually putting it as a question.

Mr WILSON: And the second question really is - it is a question about we are interested in budget and we are interested in the actuals year-to-date, because we can give you the possibles broken down budget year-to-date, but the year-end stuff will not be available until, obviously, the ...

Mr CONLAN: No. 1 April, I think, was the figure you had.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you could put that as a question then. Because I had it as something to be tabled as an undertaking rather than a question on notice. So, if we are going to have a question on notice I need it as a question.

Mr WILSON: So, it is two questions.

Question on Notice No 7.6

Mr CONLAN: So can you provide the budget movement from 1 July 2009 to 1 April 2010 for Alice Springs and Darwin/

Mr WILSON: The budget, not that actual?

Mr CONLAN: No, the actual, the actual. What it is. How much it actually costs. Has cost the hospital, those two hospitals right now to run - to run that hospital from 1 July 2009 to 1 April.

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Mr WILSON: 30 April.

Mr CONLAN: 30 April.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.6.

Mr CONLAN: With a breakdown. Will it have a breakdown of where that money has gone? Can we break that down? How much for the laundry, how much for the catering, how much for staffing, and the whole bit. You cannot do that?

We have a commentary going on in the background. I did not think it was ridiculous to ask how much it actually costs to run the Territory hospitals.

Mr RYAN: We can do it.

Mr BEIRNE: Peter Beirne Chief Operations Officer. If I could just clarify the question again, sorry. I think I understand what you are after, but you are going to ask two questions, in fact. You were actually wanting to understand the budget movement. So, the published budget that was in the 2009-10 budget compared to the published budget in the 2010-11 and why it grew? That seems to be one question that you were asking.

Mr CONLAN: Well, I can find those here in the budget papers, though, and the variation. What I want is a breakdown of actually what it costs to run a specific hospital in the Northern Territory, and those specific hospitals are Alice Springs and Royal Darwin Hospitals.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think that is the other ...

Mr CONLAN: A breakdown of costings. As I said, with staffing and bringing in a specialist at the Alice Springs Hospital; how much it costs to run the laundry. Are you able to provide that information from the 1 July 2009 to the 30 April?

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: The other question is with the broader appropriation, so that might go to non-specific output.

Minister, how many Department of Health and Families staff reported assaults by members of the public in the course of their duties in the past 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is in non specific ...

Mr CONLAN: That is at Admitted Patient Services, I would have thought.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Non-specific.

Mr CONLAN: Non-specific. All right, what about bed occupancy? Can you provide the details of bed occupancy for all our five hospitals in the Territory? What I am looking for is, available beds, available bed days, total bed days and bed occupancy rates. And, how many overflow beds are available in each hospital?

Mr VATSKALIS: The measurement of bed occupancy is quite complex.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I know, there is a little table, and I was provided this, but are you able to provide

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that?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are happy to provide that, Helen Mason will provide the details for that one, and with probably a layman's explanation too.

Mr CONLAN: Please.

Ms MASON: Helen Mason, Acting Deputy Chief Executive, Acute Care. The figures that I will quote are the funded bed occupancy rates, and these rates exclude mental health and exclude borders. I will give these figures by hospital. First of all, in terms of available beds; Royal Darwin Hospital - 367; Alice Springs - 171; Katherine Hospital - 60; Gove District Hospital - 32; and, Tennant Creek - 20.

Available bed days, and again in the same order: Royal Darwin Hospital – 133 955; Alice Springs Hospital – 62 415; Katherine Hospital – 21 900; Gove Hospital - 1680; Tennant Creek Hospital - 7300.

I move on to the total actual bed days incurred: Royal Darwin Hospital – 127 735; Alice Springs – 55 609; Katherine Hospital – 12 979; Gove Hospital - 7710; Tennant Creek Hospital - 2942. Those figures then give an occupancy rate of: 95.36% for Royal Darwin Hospital; 89.1% for Alice Springs; ...

Mr CONLAN: sorry, what was that for Alice Springs again?

Ms MASON: That was 89.1% Katherine - 59.26%; Gove - 66.01%; and Tennant Creek - 40.3%, which gives an overall occupancy rate across the five Territory hospitals of 87.24%

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Could you table those figures please?

The average hospital occupancy rate for each Territory hospital, as a percentage, that what you just gave. So that was for ...

Ms MASON: So, do you want me to go over them again?

Mr CONLAN: No, if you could, was it just, for Tennant Creek, I am sorry ...

Ms MASON: Tennant Creek was 40.3%.

Mr CONLAN: 40.3%, okay, thank you. And could you table those figures? Are you happy to table those figures for us, those occupancy rates?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: I know you spoke about nursing hours per patient day. I believe this fits into this output group, gentlemen?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Has the final independent report into the implementation of the nursing hours per patient day staffing model been completed, minister, do you know?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Has it been publicly released yet?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, it was an internal document, it was not for public release.

Mr CONLAN: Would you provide this committee with a copy of that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, it was an internal document.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to table that, or would you like to take that as a question on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide you a copy of the report.

Mr CONLAN: Great. Do you want me to ask that again?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We can take it as an undertaking which happens sometimes, or we can do it formally as a question on notice.

Mr CONLAN: I will take it formally as a question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.7

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you say they question again so we know exactly what you are asking?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, will you provide the independent report into the implementation of the nursing hours per patient-based staffing model to the committee?

Mr CHAIRMAN: And that is question No 7.7.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, what is the agreed nursing hours per patient day benchmark for each nursing unit in each Territory hospital, do you have that information?

Mr WILSON: We do not have that information here. I think we have some background on how it operates.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Thank you.

Mr WILSON: So following its general benchmarking, the project was lead by a Professor of Nursing, then nursing hours per patient day per unit were established across all Territory hospitals so there would be, for example, 20, 25 benchmark levels, at Royal Darwin probably 12 and Alice Springs, and several in each of the smaller jurisdictions. The process then is for general managers to work with nurse leaders to ensure that hospitals boards and departments are operating with a narrow range of the identified nursing hours per patient day, and moving to this model resulted in a significant increase in nurses across Territory hospitals last year.

Mr VATSKALIS: And (inaudible) now has \$5m to implement the nursing hours per patient day. I am very pleased to say that currently Katherine District Hospital meets the target, and Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital meet target; we need extra five nurses in Tennant Creek and Gove to meet the prescribed targets.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. You said you did not have the information here, but are you able to provide that, take that on notice for the committee, the agreed benchmark for each nursing unit in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we can do that.

Question on Notice No 7.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you ask that as a question then?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you provide the agreed national nursing hours per patient day benchmark for each nursing unit in each Territory hospital.

Mr CHAIRMAN: And that is question No 7.8.

Mr CONLAN: And minister, what is the agreed personnel budget for each nursing unit in the Northern Territory?

Mr WILSON: We do not have that here, but we can take that on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have to remember this is a very specific question which (inaudible) very narrow areas, so if you are ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Two things there. One, in a second I will get you to read that question; two, but if witnesses, could each time they speak, would say their name so *Hansard* can identify your voice later. Member for Greatorex, read the question please.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, will you provide the agreed personnel budget for each nursing unit in the Northern Territory.

Mr RYAN: Just to clarify, if you are actually after the budget for how much we spend on nursing, we would not have that because it would be a personnel component of an operating unit. So if we had general wards in the hospital that would be a personnel budget of nurses, doctors and physical staff, which we can provide, but we would not have the specific budget for nursing staff. There may be some units that are nurse staffed, but that would not cover all nursing. I am not sure exactly what you are trying to get.

Mr CONLAN: Looking for the personnel budget for each nursing unit in the Northern Territory, but you do not have that data, is that right?

Mr RYAN: Nurses are not funded from one unit; they would be funded in a number of branches within the hospitals or, in fact, outside of hospitals if we are talking about health and wellbeing as well. So, the total nursing budget for the department we do not have as a specific line item because it is a personnel budget which includes nursing and non-nursing staff. That is what I am trying to get at, and each unit would have a combination of staff in its make up, so ...

Mr CONLAN: So what can you provide then around that question?

Mr RYAN: We have already endeavoured to give you hospital budgets which will have personnel in operational so, yes, it will have a personnel component, and it will be by area of service deliveries.

Mr CONLAN: And will that have a break down of administration, medical staff in it, or will it just be a staff component as a whole?

Mr RYAN: That will just be the dollar cost of staffing. We can provide FTE breakdowns which will give you streams of staff by hospitals, etcetera, if you wish.

Mr CONLAN: Can you provide that ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that clarification for the written Question on Notice No 7.6? Or do we need another

question on notice?

Mr RYAN: Yes, I think we need to amend 7.6 because we could not deliver the question as it was provided.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not think we need to formally amend it. I am not sure if you can repeat question 7.6 for an amendment, or is more with that extra knowledge we would then provide ...?

Mr CONLAN: The information you will provide on the breakdown of hospital staffing, is a blanket? All staffing, but ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I suggest we do a written question on notice No 7.9, and the question is you request question 7.6 includes an FTE?

Question on Notice No 7.9

Mr CONLAN: Yes, okay. Can question 7.6 also include a breakdown of FTEs at Territory hospitals?

Mr RYAN: At what point in time?

Mr CONLAN: From 1 July to 30 April - the same time frame.

Mr RYAN: We have staffing levels per pay through that period. If you are after the full financial year you will get ...

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr RYAN: It will be quite a big report. We can give you the ...

Mr CONLAN: In that case, can I ...

Mr RYAN: ... I can give it to you as at last pay would be much simpler.

Mr CONLAN: The last pay for the end of the financial year?

Mr RYAN: No, because we have not reached it. For the most recent pay we can give you a breakdown of FTE, by hospital.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Helen to provide information on hospital nursing staff in numbers if you wish. That will be overall.

Ms MASON: I would provide some of the FTE numbers now, if that would be useful.

Mr CONLAN: That would be. I am happy for you to table that though. What I am looking for is the amount spent on the FTEs.

Back to that figure of \$104m for Alice Springs hospital, or \$216m as at 30 April, does that include the FTE figure to the last pay?

Mr RYAN: That was to the last pay in April.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the recommended number of hours under the nursing hours-per-patient-day model is 152 hours a month, which is split into one eight-hour fortnight, and one 72-hour fortnight. Is this being adhered to throughout the department, and are any employed nurses regularly working more hours than this?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have made a decision nurses not on rostered hours would not work overtime unless there is approval by a supervisor. The 60-hour decision will not apply to nurses working overtime.

I am concerned personally, and I think everybody is concerned, about overtired nurses. They should not be working excessive hours unless they are rostered, because if you have rostered hours you are working for a certain period of time and then you have days off. People who are working during the day should not consider a certain period of time during the week. Helen?

Ms MASON: In nursing overtime and capping it to prevent unsafe working hours, which is essentially the question being asked, the Department of Health and Families has introduced a decision point of 60-hours total work in a week. A key issue to note is rather than a cap on working hours, the decision point is one where nursing management is required to ensure further overtime performed is done without compromising employee safety and quality of patient care. It is important to note the 60-hour decision point applies only to nurses working overtime, and not nurses working rostered hours.

In some instances you will have a nurse working a roster that would put them over that period in a particular week. For example, there might be a nurse who is working 10-hour shifts in a week, so there would not be a decision point there at the 60 hours. All programs in which nurses are employed within the department have agreed to the process, with minor modifications to allow for different positions with responsibility in respect to particular branches in hospitals. In the figures and the numbers of nurses who have been working more than 60 hours, there has been a reduction in those over time.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Some nurses are working 60 hours a week, is that what you said? Is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, 60 hours is the point where they have to actually consult with a supervisor, and the supervisor makes the decision if they can work more. However, what Helen said, if you are rostered days - you have rostered days you work - you can exceed the 60 hours because, after you finish your roster, you have got one, two or three days off.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, okay. So, are any nurses or employed nurses regularly working more than 152 hours a month, as recommended by the nursing hours per patient day model?

Mr WILSON: there are two issues, member for Greatorex. The issue of nurses overtime was identified some years ago, three or four years ago as an issue of patient quality, and of health and safety for nurses. A monitoring system was put in place to report the number of occasions, by hospital, a nurse worked 60 hours a week or more. In discussion with ANF, the Australian Nursing Federation, last year, it was agreed we would try to move that down to 50 hours a week to further reduce the risk to nurses and, also, to staff.

We can report that, since October 2008, there has been a decrease in the number of incidents in each hospital in which nurses are working 60 hours or more.

The second part of your question – what I have interpreted as the second part of your question, member for Greatorex - is the issue of how the nursing hours per patient day are fitted into the model for calculation of numbers of nurses per shift, and the number of hours, in fact, they do. I argue they are completely different questions. We can certainly expand more on the nursing hours per patient day model if that is useful.

It really is a question of how do you ensure that, for the number of patients and the type of patient,

they is the right number of nurses on a shift averaged over a period of a month.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Can you table that information you provided?

Mr WILSON: We can table information on the number of occasions where nurses have worked more than 60 hours of rostered work in a week, since October 2008.

Mr CONLAN: What about instances where nurses have worked more than 152 hours a month? Do you have that information?

Mr WILSON: We do not have that.

Mr CONLAN: So, you are not sure whether or not nurses are working more than the recommended number of hours under the ...

Mr WILSON: In effect, your question would be how many nurses do overtime on any occasion.

Mr CONLAN: And how much overtime?

Mr WILSON: And how much overtime they do.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Can we be specific on that? Can you table that? I will take that on notice.

Mr WILSON: We do not have that information, we would have to take that notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have ...

Question on Notice No 7.10

Mr CHAIRMAN: So can you just then repeat it.

Mr CONLAN: Would you please provide the committee with the amount of overtime undertaken by nurses in Territory hospitals broken down by hospital and how much overtime?

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.10.

Mr CONLAN: That might answer this question, but how many 12-hour shift rosters have been approved since the implementation of the nursing hours per patient day model?

Mr WILSON: We would have to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you could just repeat the question for Hansard, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: How many 12-hour shift rosters have been approved since the implementation of the nursing hours per patient day model?

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.11.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, do you know if there are any 12-hour shifts currently in operation?

Mr WILSON: I can answer that. There are some 12-hour shifts being worked. In specialist units, it is quite standard.

Mr CONLAN: And these have been approved by the Chief Executive and the Commissioner for Public Employment in consultation with the ANF?

Mr WILSON: They would have been.

Mr CONLAN: They have been?

Mr WILSON: As far as I am aware, they have been.

Mr CONLAN: For what reason have the 12-hour shifts been implemented? I mean, you are aware of some at the moment, so?

Mr WILSON: The general reason that 12-hour shifts are introduced are particularly in the areas like intensive care units around Australia, and certainly in the Northern Territory as well, and you have, of course, with the 24-hour cover to provide, you either have shifts of indeterminate length, or you have eight-hour shifts, or you have something like 12-hour shifts, so two nurses per shift work. And in areas like ICU, that is the preferred method for ICU nurses. Also, many hospitals need eight nurses. Some hospitals emergency department nurses prefer to work a least number of shifts per week, and there is reasonable evidence that, in areas like ICU, the patient care is not compromised.

Mr CONLAN: And just how many, just again, just how many there are, that you will provide that information. That was a question on notice, anyway.

Mr WILSON: The question is, how many departments ...

Question on Notice No 7.12

Mr CONLAN: Yes. So we established that there are some, and we have established the reasons why. I would just like to know how many are actually being posted. I thought I did ask that question on notice, did I not?

Okay, so how many 12-hour shifts are currently operational?

Mr WILSON: Can I suggest the member puts, how many departments in the Northern Territory hospitals operate 12-hour shift rosters?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.12, as read by Dr Wilson.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you have said, you boasted in quite a few releases about the 95 nurses that you have employed in the last 12 months, I think it was, was it, from ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Ninety-five nurses to meet the nursing hours per person day.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Now, are they new nurses? Or are they have been moved from other areas with specific skills, or are they brand new nurses, from the ground, straight out of college, in the hospital?

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Mr WILSON: Those are newly-funded positions. They are an increase in the number of nurses that are employed across the Territory, so they would be nurses experienced in other places moving here, they would be your graduates.

Mr CONLAN: So it is not 95 new nurses, it is actually 95 positions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Ninety-five new positions.

Mr CONLAN: Which is contrary to the boast by yourself, minister, which is actually 95 new nurses.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have new positions, already established, so we have to get those 95 nurses on the payroll.

Mr CONLAN: All right. But they are not new nurses. It is not like we have got 95 extra nurses straight out of college in our wards?

Mr MASON: The point that Mr Wilson was making is that there are 95 new staff positions, but not all of those have been staffed by new graduates, because you have a recruitment process where these positions became available, and it might have been somebody who is working in a different ward, or working on a casual basis, or it might have been a new grad, who filled those roles, so it would not be true to say that they are all completely new nurses to the Territory, they might have doing agency work and moved into one of these roles, it could be a new grad who has recently been in a position to take up one of the roles. I think that is the point that we are trying to make here.

Mr CONLAN: No, I understand that, I do.

Mr VATSKALIS: The positions are vacant ...

Mr CONLAN: Well, that is right. The boast by yourself is that we have got 95 new nurses on the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly. You cannot find new nurses that have moved into ...

Mr CONLAN: Ninety-five new positions.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, hold on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The call is with the minister.

Mr CONLAN: It is all right, I suspected as much, but that is okay. Thank you for the clarification.

Now, aero-med is the non-admitted patient care? Can I just go back to a previous question before we move on to some other stuff?

Can you stand here, minister, with your hand on your heart and tell us that there will be absolutely no over-run in Alice Springs or Royal Darwin Hospitals at the end of this financial year?

Mr VATSKALIS: David made it very clear how the system operates.

Mr CONLAN: You have just said that, you have told us that it is tracking at \$104m at this point - \$216m for RDH - that would indicate that there is not. So do you believe what you are being told or not?

Mr VATSKALIS: David, you can answer that. Make it simple.

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Mr RYAN: Again, by hospital we expect within 1% to 2% they may go over, but we will cover that internally with existing resources.

Mr CONLAN: 1% to 2%?

Mr RYAN: Yes. It is a crystal ball.

Mr CONLAN: I think we all know what it is. It is just a matter of finding it and getting the department to admit it.

Mr RYAN: We still have a few weeks to go before the end of next year, so we are still spending money.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, exactly. So there is a chance that there could be a reasonable over run and the figures that have been suggested could probably be accurate?

Mr VATSKALIS: If, in the next few weeks, we get a new wave of swine flu with ...

Mr CONLAN: So, that is all it would take? It would take something special like that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Mr VATSKALIS: The thing is with hospitals, health is not: 'I am planning to have 100 people in the hospital this year'. There might be 120 people, something may go wrong, something may have happened and, you know very well, you cannot really plan for so many people to be admitted to hospital. You only need about 20 people to have some critical renal problem to actually blow your costs out, because they have been admitted to hospital, you cannot say if we have something like that.

Rotavirus recently in Alice Springs, there was an epidemic of that virus; a number of kids had to be admitted to hospital. You cannot predict it

Mr WOOD: *E.coli*.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not had an incident yet.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so barring that, these unforeseen circumstances, minister ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I think David made it very clear that the over run will be 1% to 2% at the current projections.

Mr RYAN: Our statutory requirement is to report by output and that is a different structure to what you are looking at in the hospital specific. The hospital specific is just an internal management target we set, and there are other things in acute care that are outside the hospitals, like in across- border patients who are paying for patients to get treatment interstate, and that all forms a part of that admitted and non-admitted patients.

Mr CONLAN: Can you assure us, minister, there has been no money diverted from other programs to, for lack of a better word, to prop-up the Alice Springs and Darwin Hospitals in terms of the budget situation? Definitely not or ...

Mr RYAN: There has been no diversion of budgets from other areas.

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Mr CONLAN: ... into other areas or other programs.

Mr RYAN: No.

Mr CONLAN: What about the suggestion that Alice Springs Hospital has been using intervention money instead of NT government money to keep it in the black? In other words, a procedure as such undertaken at the Alice Springs Hospital is being paid for with intervention money as opposed to NT government money. Is there any truth in that suggestion at all?

Mr RYAN: No, there would not be.

Mr CONLAN: Absolutely not?

Mr RYAN: Alice Springs Hospital would have got some funding with the intervention, I do not believe it got any this financial year but, whatever was provided for it was allocated and would have been spent appropriately.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. We move onto Aero-Med.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is Output 2.1. You indicated Aero-Med was in 2.1.

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have a question about Aero-Med?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I do. Minister, when does the contract with Pearl to provide Aero-Med services between Katherine cease?

Mr VATSKALIS: Pearl Aviation will cease to provide aero-medical services to the top of the Northern Territory on 30 June 2010.

Mr CONLAN: How many aircraft are currently supplied under this contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: Four. Pearl Aviation.

Mr CONLAN: Who will have the contract after this date?

Mr VATSKALIS: From 1 July 2010 to 31 December 2010 an interim provider, CareFlight New South Wales. New South Wales is actually misleading, because CareFlight is registered here.

Mr CONLAN: What is the breakdown of this service, minister? Is there any real difference between what Pearl has offered and what CareFlight will offer?

Mr VATSKALIS: The arrangement with CareFlight is different because CareFlight will do the logistic coordination, provide the aircraft, and also the rotary wing helicopter.

Mr CONLAN: What is the price of the contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is commercial-in-confidence, and I cannot disclose that. The reason also is we have a tender in place at the moment, so it would be very unwise to start ...

Mr CONLAN: What has the department budgeted for?

Mr VATSKALIS: That would clearly indicate how much we are going to pay and would breach confidentiality.

Mr CONLAN: The situation in Katherine, where are with that? I know Pearl is doing a 12/7 there. Have Care Flight indicated they would be prepared to do a 24/7 into Katherine?

Ms CAHILL: Robyn Cahill, Director, Systems Performance Acute Care. Recently there has been advice that we will be able to look at revising what is occurring in Katherine. Discussions with Defence are they are going to do a burn. It was planned for June, but they have had to delay because of the late Wet, so it is planned for August. We will have another look at what is going on with Katherine once that burn has occurred. There are concerns about being able to identify the number of, dare I say it, wallabies present around the strip at this point in time because of the height of the grass and the foliage around the airstrip.

Once the burn has occurred CareFlight have indicated they will reassess, which is an ongoing situation with Pearl as well. They have also indicated they would reassess once the ability to do so was there.

Mr CONLAN: Does the department have any idea of the numbers of wallabies within the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We rely on the information provided to us by the Defence department.

Mr CONLAN: What information have they given you?

Mr VATSKALIS: Unfortunately somebody had the bright idea to fence the place before they removed the wallabies. They created an artificial population inside the fences protected from any predators, with plenty of feeding and watering points, so the population exploded.

Ms PURICK: Are going to burn the bush to kill the wallabies?

Mr WOOD: Have they not built a second fence?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and they practice humane culling. They have to remove the vegetation so they can see the wallabies.

Ms CAHILL: A point of clarification on the burn. In relation to the drying out of the foliage around the airstrip, it is a safety risk, so they do a burn every Dry Season to remove the safety risk, the same as occurs at Darwin airport. That is why the burn is occurring, and once that has occurred they will be able to see more clearly the number of wallabies.

Mr VATSKALIS: The other thing, the decision to land or take off from the airport is not the department's decision, it is the pilot. The pilot makes the decision. The reason the Pearl Aviation pilot would not land or take off at night was because of the wallaby danger. When you have an F13 taking off which hits a wallaby the damage would be minimal cost, however if you have a Twin hitting a wallaby at take off it will most likely be disastrous, like the one recently in New South Wales that crashed on the strip.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask what they do for outback strips?

Mr VATSKALIS: Because of the drought we have wallabies in the Top End, and we had a number of other airstrips with wallabies - Victoria River had a problem and we allocated money for fencing. We have a problem because of the drought situation. In the Centre you do not have a drought situation, and the wallabies will start moving out.

Mr WOOD: We have had aero-med for 30 something years?

Mr CONLAN: That is true. Every airstrip in the country has wildlife access.

Mr CONLAN: Well it is true. Every airstrip in the country has wildlife access – cows, buffalo, camels and ...

Mr VATSKALIS: True, but not in the ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Those had a lot of communities that did not have sealed airstrips where aeromedical never used to land. That is true.

Mr WOOD: They landed on the Daly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The call is with the shadow minister.

Mr CONLAN: The question was that what advice has the Defence department provided you with the number of wallabies that are ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They continue the cull. I know they continue to cull. Robyn, have you any additional advice?

Ms CAHILL: Robyn Cahill, Director Systems Performance. Just recently, we had indication from Pearl that they would be willing to reconsider landing at Katherine, so we consulted with Defence as to their view as to the numbers. Their concern was they were unable to ascertain the numbers due to the late Wet and the inability to actually clear the area. They were concerned that, once the burn occurred, the numbers would be significant. So, we took that into consideration as to what we would do.

We have indicated to Pearl we are willing to do a case-by-case review and, if they feel the risk of not landing there is greater than the risk of landing there, we can actually allow that to happen in Katherine. In terms of other airstrips, there have been occasions in other airstrips where they have not been able to land because of wallaby numbers, and they do an assessment prior to landing at each of the remote strips. Somebody goes and checks and clears.

Mr VATSKALIS: We also have the helicopter, which is available for night flies to Katherine and from Katherine.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. But, just to make that point that there are airstrips around. Every airstrip is subject to wildlife. Sydney airport has major bird hazards, for example. So, it is not ...

Mr VATSKALIS: As Darwin has. The problem with the wallabies in Katherine is the type of aircraft we use, which actually is a small aeroplane.

Mr CONLAN: Well, they are not that small. We are not talking about a 172, for example. It is a Beechcraft or – what do we have?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, but hitting a wallaby during take off and losing a wheel could be a disaster, really.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, there is no doubt about it. But, the onus should be resting on the pilot, and the government should be encouraging the contractor to land ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The safety of the pilot and the passengers comes first.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is right. Okay. So, after the burn - and I believe there will be a cull after the

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burn, say in August, September - they will assess the numbers. My information it is about 400 or so. Then, take up discussion with Pearl from there - is that how it is going to work?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, with the new provider.

Mr CONLAN: I believe there are a couple of other questions, but I will, of course ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, 2.1? We are going to lunch in 12 minutes.

Mr WOOD: Okay. First of all, a general question about RDH, and it is in regard to maintenance. I visited the hospital recently, and the one thing that hit me straight away - and I was going there, unfortunately, to see a relation who was dying - was the state of the car park at RDH is this. For a hospital that should pride itself on cleanliness inside, the outside was a disgrace. That is a photo I took a week later from when I first visited, and the whole of the car park looks like that. Oncology does not, the palliative care does not, but the car park radiate.

The other thing I noticed, minister, because I was there for quite a while just looking - external windows are very dirty. I was going to ask as well, is there an external maintenance program? When was it last done in relation to cleaning the windows? I know it is a difficult building; I am not that silly, I have had a look at the building and it is not an easy building to maintain from the outside. Is there a maintenance contractor who mows the grass and picks up all the rubbish?

Mr VATSKALIS: I know it is a very difficult building to maintain, that you cannot stand up on the snow sills and clean the windows. I will let Ms Liz Stackhouse, the General Manager of the Royal Darwin Hospital, respond to that.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Thank you, minister. Liz Stackhouse, General Manager of Royal Darwin Hospital. Over the weekend and during this week, the external contractor has been in to clean all the windows. We only do it in the Dry because it is too difficult in the Wet ...

Mr WOOD: You saw my camera coming along.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes, annual program. That is currently being done and we are about halfway through that. We do have two members of staff who are groundsmen, who mow the lawns and remove the litter. It is a very big campus, so they move around the campus. I know the helicopter pad was mowed last week.

Mr WOOD: But this was rubbish, minister, this is rubbish, it should not be there, and it is also the first contact for a lot of people, even though this is one of the worst car parks to find a place in.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is true.

Mr WOOD: I am not going to ask you about car parking spaces, but this is the first contact a lot of people have, and they see it straight away, and for me it is disappointing.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes, for me it is disappointing that Territorians litter and do not actually use the rubbish tins that are throughout the campus, but we do have a rolling program of removing the waste, including collecting the litter. So, hopefully, next time you are back, that will not be there.

Mr WOOD: And the grass will be ...

Ms STACKHOUSE: Well, it is difficult actually, you know, between the car parks, to take the mowers.

Mr WOOD: I realise that.

Ms STACKHOUSE: But there is a program of removing the grass over the Dry Season.

Mr WOOD: It used to be my kind of work, too, if done gently and quietly at the right time, you can do it, I must admit. There are not all those cars there all the time, so you adjust your maintenance within vehicles (inaudible).

Ms STACKHOUSE: That is true, and there are 1212 car parks on the campus.

Mr WOOD: Minister, are there any plans to get staff a car park?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. We have commissioned a study, we have the study back, and we currently are trying to find out how we can implement some of the recommendations. Ms Stackhouse can expand on that.

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes, there was believed by the consultants to be a shortfall of about 100 car spots, so we are currently assessing how we would, and where we would put those car parks. There are also a number of other recommendations around ensuring the safety of where the car spots are, maintenance of it?

Mr WOOD: Any thought of building a multistorey car park and perhaps using underneath for offices or for commercial activity?

Ms STACKHOUSE: Yes, multistorey car parks are significantly more expensive ...

Mr WOOD: They are.

Ms STACKHOUSE: ... than ground level car parks, to the vicinity of about 10 times the cost per car space.

Mr WOOD: You are not running out of space, are you?

Ms STACKHOUSE: There is still quite a lot of space out there. My preference is that we actually would increase the availability of parking for bicycles, as well as increasing the number of buses that come through the Royal Darwin Hospital so that public transport is improved, as well as the fitness of our staff and patients.

Mr WOOD: We are getting our bicycle path to Howard Springs and I think there is nearly a direct connection to the hospital. By the time we get there, we might need to be an acute patient, that is the only problem.

Minister, in relation to Patient Assistance Travel, and I refer to a letter that was in, I think, *The Centralian Advocate* on 27 April, and it is related to a lady who was declined Alice Springs patient travel, and basically because someone had said to her Caucasian people usually find their own way home. She felt that that was racist and that she should be entitled to the same treatment as anyone else. I can table this letter.

Mr VATSKALIS: Please.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is Patient Assistance Travel available to people who are returning from hospital to remote areas of the NT? Is it available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people? How many Indigenous people have been assisted through this service, and how many non-Indigenous people have been assisted through this service? I think this question needs to be answered publicly.

Mr VATSKALIS: Let me assure you that PATS applies to all Territorians, irrespective of colour, or ethnicity or cultural background, and we do not ask people if they are Aboriginal people or non-Aboriginal people when we provide PATS. PATS is provided to people if they need it to travel interstate because the service is not available in the Northern Territory. Our government is quite generous. Our PATS is equivalent to PATS systems in other states. We have actually put \$1.5m recurrent to enhance it, on top of the \$2m in the 2008-09 financial year. We provide an escort for every patient travelling interstate for surgery, grant transport allowance of \$40 for return interstate trip, increased the commercial accommodation rate to \$35 per night, and increased the private vehicle allowance if people choose to travel to 15 cents per kilometre. It does not apply to a particular group of people, it applies to all Territorians.

I do not know why this person would have received that response. I would like you to table that letter and I will follow it up.

Mr WOOD: Okay. Minister, I did not ask this question last year, but I have asked it on other occasions. Could you give the details of the number of abortions, non-Indigenous and Indigenous, in Northern Territory hospitals over the last five years? Do you have a counselling service in the hospitals or Health department that encourages and assists mothers to continue with their pregnancy and, if not, why not? And should not the government be at least trying to reduce the number of abortions?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, terminations of pregnancies is an individual choice and also, in some cases, medical choice either for the health of the mother or because of the health of the baby. I will not make a comment on that if it is right or wrong.

Mr WOOD: I have not asked you to, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: In 2009-10 there were about 417 abortions throughout the Territory. There were 334 in Royal Darwin Hospital, 82 in Alice Springs, and one in Gove.

Mr WILSON: The figures the minister has just released quite correctly 417, those are not the full year figures; those were the figures that were available for this report.

Mr WOOD: My original question was: can I get the numbers of abortions, non-Indigenous and Indigenous, in Northern Territory hospitals over the last five years so I can see a trend.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that on notice then?

Mr WILSON: We will take that on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have only got the three years, but I can give you the five years. But I do not have a breakdown of Indigenous or non-Indigenous but, again it is a procedure offered to all Territorians irrespective if they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

Mr WOOD: That is true, minister, but when you read your Northern Territory annual report that is not the way you do things, you break them up accordingly.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide this information to you.

Question on Notice No 7.13

Mr WOOD: Minister, can you give us details of the number abortions, non-Indigenous and Indigenous in Northern Territory hospitals over the last five years?

Mr CHAIRMAN: And that is question No 7.13.

Mr WOOD: The other question is in relation to security at RDH. I know you have no-smoking areas, but are you able to give us an idea of what the cost of security is at Royal Darwin Hospital?

Mr WILSON: I am not sure if we can give you that, but we are certainly happy to take that on notice and if we can get a figure for you then I am very happy to give you that.

Question on Notice No 7.14.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat that member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: How much does it cost to provide security for Royal Darwin Hospital, on an annual basis?

Mr CHAIRMAN: And that is question No 7.14.

Mr WOOD: My last question is a general question about hospitals. Did the government promise to build a hospital at Palmerston and, if so, have they reconsidered that in relation to the possible development of Weddell as probably the third new city in the Darwin region?

Mr VATSKALIS: We commissioned Ernst & Young to develop a hospital services plan for the Northern Territory over the next 20 years, not only for Darwin or rural. The report is near completion and sensible consideration by the Minister for Health, myself, and by Cabinet in due course. There are 54 accommodations covering six areas managing demand and applying for future green costs services, but it is important to identify where the pressure is where, where the demand is, what kind of centre we need and where, subject to aged care because we are starting have more old people in the Territory; capital infrastructure; what we need; how big it is going to be, is it going to be a full grown hospital or not; the workforce, where are we going to find the people. Now we have the medical school and, of course, the nurses school its much easier, but the technology and the organisation.

We have not said it is going to be build there, we know that we will definitely need one in the growing rural area of Darwin because rural area and Palmerston are growing so, obviously, it has to be somewhere not in the centre of Darwin, but somewhere further out from Darwin.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Macdonnell has a clarification question for you.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, where do I ask the question about the Aboriginal Interpreter Service Review of the Alice Springs Hospital. So can I ask it in general questions?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Non-output specific. So, that is at the end.

Ms ANDERSON. Okay.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are resuming at Output 2.1 with member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: The clarification I wanted was whether ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is in generic. In out of ...

Ms ANDERSON: Later on, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, member for Goyder has a local member question.

Mr PURICK: Minister, it is in regard to aero-medical. I understand in February this year the 80 nurses employed with the aero-medical contract through the department of Health were told their employment was no longer required. Are those nurses going to be gainfully employed through the department of Health?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is not true; they were not told they were no longer required. They were offered positions within the department, or offered leave without pay if they wanted to apply for a position with the new aero-medical provider. No nurses were dismissed or transferred. If they wanted to leave, that was their choice.

Ms PURICK: How many have opted to stay on, and how many have elected to leave?

Ms MASON: The majority have elected to stay on. Seven staff members chose voluntary retrenchment.

Ms PURICK: The reason I am asking is I have a few of these people living in my electorate in the rural area, so it is quite legitimate.

Minster, given there has been about 64 years of history with aero-medical, is the government planning any particular thank you to acknowledge the service and the work these nurses - some of them, as you know, have had 30 years experience in aero-medical, and one person in particular lives in my electorate - to thank them for their invaluable service and contribution to remote nursing.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have a problem with that. It is a good idea, and I will take it on board.

Ms PURICK: Thank you. Can I clarify that, you said seven took redundancy?

Ms MASON: Voluntary retrenchment.

Ms PURICK: What happened to the rest of them?

Ms MASON: It is a combination of taking positions within the department, or taking leave without pay to work for the interim provider.

Ms PURICK: Has the interim provider, which I understand is CareFlight New South Wales - is there any arrangement between the NT government and CareFlight to give preference to these highly skilled and professional people?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, there is not, and I met with the Nursing Federation. I advised the Nursing Federation (inaudible) skills be provided, and we will stick to it, we are not going to lower the bar. The Nursing Federation negotiated with CareFlight New South Wales about the provision of services.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, some issues around aero-medical services to Katherine, how many trained flight nurses are located at Katherine at present?

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice is two, but we will confirm that information. Bear in mind that they will be located Katherine. It is provided with the current provider, Pearl Aviation but, then, when contract

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finishes, they are not going to be working for Pearl Aviation.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, I realise that. Is that going to be a question on notice, or can we confirm that?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide that before the end of the session.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is currently. How many flight nurses will be posted in Katherine once the interim contract comes in on the 1 July?

Mr VATSKALIS: Ms Cahill will be responding.

Ms CAHILL: Robyn Cahill, Director Systems Performance Acute Care. Based in Katherine, there will be 2.25 FTE. That covers the day shift. The night shift for Katherine is covered out of Darwin with the helicopter service.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Right, thank you. Under the interim contract, how many flight-trained doctors will be located in Katherine?

Ms CAHILL: Well, the doctors will be working based in Darwin, at this point in time.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So, the answer is zero?

Ms CAHILL: Zero.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, under the interim contract, how many aircraft will be allocated to duties for Aeromedical Services in the Top End?

Ms CAHILL: There will be a total of four aircraft in the configuration – fixed-wing aircraft sorry. One based in Gove, one based in Darwin, one based in Katherine, and the fourth aircraft is for scheduled maintenance, which is the current configuration, plus the rotor-wing aircraft which will be based in Darwin.

Mr VATSKALIS: There are not going to be a reduction of the number of aeroplanes. The interim contract will replace exactly the contract provided by Pearl Aviation.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay. Can you confirm the same number of aircraft is operating presently under the Pearl contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: Four aircraft operating. Well, the agreement is to provide four aircraft. The problem was actually because of the age of the aircraft. They needed more maintenance and, sometimes, more than one aircraft needed to be looked after because of mechanical problems. That is the reason the contract was actually finished earlier, in order to avoid the situation that we did not have other aircraft in the air.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It is my understanding, minister - perhaps you can confirm this or otherwise for me - that currently there are actually five aircraft, excluding the rotary wing, that are available.

Ms CAHILL: There was an agreed variation reached with Pearl in January because of the difficulties with the unscheduled maintenance levels that were increasing with the age of the aircraft, and the difficulties with training and checking of their pilots. They had approached us to ask if we could actually include another aircraft into the mix for that purpose, so it would reduce the impact on the actual aero-retrieval service. We reached an arrangement where we provided an additional aircraft to do that for a short term.

Mr VATSKALIS: That was only temporary because of the problems which occurred with the other aircraft.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Was there an additional cost to the Northern Territory as a result of having that extra aircraft?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, there was an additional cost for the aircraft.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Can you please tell me what that cost was?

Ms CAHILL: It is part of a commercial contract that was reached, so I do not believe I can reveal that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Commercial-in-confidence.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. It is my understanding there are two types of fixed-wing aircraft that will be used in the interim contract. Is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: No, the four aircraft are all King aircraft; they are all the same.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay. Will they all be fitted out the same?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, they will.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I just want to confirm something. Currently, my understanding is the aircraft that operate out of Darwin and Gove are colloquially called Blue Tails, and the aircraft operating out of Katherine is a Red Tail. The Red Tail aircraft can only take walk-on patients. I want to confirm that will not be the case after the 1 July this year?

Ms CAHILL: The additional aircraft that was added into the contract for Pearl was the Spectrum aircraft, and the decision was made, after consultation with all of the staff, that better utilisation of the Bluetails was to have them based in Darwin so they could be used 24/7, as we were providing the day service out of Katherine, with the helicopter providing the night service. That is not the case for the new contract or aircraft of the same configuration.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. The helicopter that is currently flying the night operations out of Katherine, what type of aircraft is it and what model? That would be the rotary wing.

Ms CAHILL: I might just have to confirm that, I am not across the type of aircraft it is, but I will just clarify that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Right, thank you. I can probably help you, I believe it is called a VK117. Can you advise at what cost per hour that helicopter is being provided for the NT government?

Mr VATSKALIS: I can provide that for you. The emergency helicopter retrieval from Katherine region have cost to the government, to date, \$2.49m. And attempts to recoup the money from the Commonwealth have failed. We tried.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, good luck with that, minister. Thank you for providing that, but what I would like to go back to is the question I asked, which is, at what cost? I understand that there is a number of hours currently that are included in the contract with CareFlight, because they have the contract for the helicopter, that is correct, yes?

Ms CAHILL: So, are you asking for the actual ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Just currently, you have got, there is a contract with CareFlight to provide the helicopter, is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: That is correct.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And contained within that contract is a set number of hours per month, I think it is, that is included in that contract price, is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: About February of this year, we determined to have a set number of hours for the provision of the service, because we deemed to be utilising it for other short-term retrievals as well, to assist with the pressure that was on the existing aero-retrieval service. So, yes, there is a fixed number of hours every month as a minimum requirement, but that arrangement, again, as a contract, that is commercial-in-confidence.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay. Well, I do not have to ask about the cost of that portion of the contract, but I will ask is, if the helicopter is utilised outside of that minimum contracted number of hours, what is the hourly cost to use the helicopter?

Ms CAHILL: Again, that is part of the commercial contract.

Mr VATSKALIS: And also, you have to remember, we are currently, through the tender, process, we assume this information can be provided as a commercial requirement for some people.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Understood. Can you tell me currently what the range of the BK117 helicopter is?

Ms CAHILL: Currently, the range that it can fly is Darwin/Katherine, before it requires refuelling. I have just got those other couple of points.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Oh, yes please.

Ms CAHILL: So, currently there are two nurses in Katherine ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Currently two.

Ms CAHILL: ... and it will increase to 2.25 under the interim service. Yes, it is a BK117, is the helicopter, which has night flying capacity and wench capacity as well.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So the helicopter has a range that will bring it from Darwin to Katherine before it needs to refuel?

Ms CAHILL: Before it needs to refuel, yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So where does it refuel?

Ms CAHILL: When it ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Where?

Ms CAHILL: Well, it lands at Tindal, and refuelling is done at Tindal Air Base.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: At Tindal, okay. When it refuels, is that before or after it picks up patients

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from the Katherine Hospital?

Ms CAHILL: The refuelling would occur at the, once the plane, well, depending on whether it is dropping off or picking up, so once the passenger is taken off, and prior to the passenger being boarded.

Mr VATSKALIS: It has to comply with the aviation rules.

Ms CAHILL: So that is the regulations; you cannot refuel with a passenger on board, the patient on board, so the patient would be en route and maybe at the airport when the helicopter lands, but if it is requires refuelling it refuels before the patient is loaded.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay, so I just want to make sure I have got this right. The helicopter would fly from Darwin to Tindal and refuel, and then fly from Tindal to the hospital if it needed to pick someone up at the hospital.

Ms CAHILL: Patients are transported to Tindal, it is standard practice.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So there are no circumstances where a patient is picked up by the helicopter at the helipad at Katherine Hospital?

Ms CAHILL: I would have to confirm that, I am not aware of that information.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I can help you. Yes, of course, there are times when the helicopter lands at Katherine Hospital helipad and picks patients up. What I am trying to determine is: when that occurs, whether the aircraft is refuelled before the patient is picked up from Katherine Hospital, or after?

Ms CAHILL: I will get confirmation of that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, and, Robyn, while you are getting confirmation on that can you find out whether there are any issues with the helicopter taking off from the helipad at Katherine Hospital fully laden, ie with a patient and fully loaded with fuel? Are you aware of any issues around that?

Ms CAHILL: I am not aware. None of this has been raised with me, no.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So, that will come back shortly?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right, thank you, I will not put it as a question on notice. How many patients does the BK117 take?

Ms CAHILL: My understanding is one patient.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: You will probably have to take this on notice, but how long does it take to refuel the helicopter?

Ms CAHILL: I am sure that will come back.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Come back, okay, thank you. So I am assuming then, if you can perhaps confirm this: that once the interim contract with CareFlight for the overall provision of services in the Top End comes in on 1 July that the BK117 will remain as the aircraft?

Ms CAHILL: That is my understanding, yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Was there any thought given to a different aircraft, given the limited range of it, that it has to refuel in Katherine?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our problem with Katherine because of the wallabies on the runway and the fact that the aircraft could not take off at night time, so what we deemed appropriate for the operation was a helicopter can actually fly to Katherine and be refuelled in Katherine and come back; but also Katherine is central, if you have to fly from there to somewhere else you can fly somewhere else because again (inaudible) Katherine and refuel. Robyn, anything to add to that?

Ms CAHILL: My understanding is that the consideration of larger rotary wing and alternate rotary wing aircraft is being considered as part of the tender process, but for the interim service we were required to keep the configuration as it was so as not to affect the tender process.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Right, thank you. Perhaps you can tell me of the aeromedical flights that take place in the Top End, what percentage or what number are obstetric-based retrievals?

Ms CAHILL: About 27% to 30%.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And, up until now, to the end of June, are all the flight nurses qualified as midwives?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, the current configuration of staff with aero-retrieval has been that they have had midwifery qualifications. After the Cornish Review was done the assessment about what is nationally accepted was taken into account and the requirement is to have availability of midwifery services for flights, which is my understanding of the tender parameters and the interim service.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay, so are you saying that from 1 July all the flight nurses will still have midwifery qualifications?

Ms CAHILL: What I am saying is the availability for midwifery support to all flights will be rostered on, yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Availability for midwifery support?

Ms CAHILL: Yes. So qualified midwifery staff will be available via a roster 24/7. It will not necessarily have every single nurse be a qualified midwife.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: No, no, I understand. Will the flight nurses who travel on these aircraft be midwifery trained, or will they be available somewhere in the hospital to call on the radio?

Ms CAHILL: There is a requirement for midwifery support to be available 24/7. My understanding is a proportion of the nursing staff employed under the interim arrangement are qualified midwives, and that would be the first point of call. There is also availability of midwives to support those flights, should they be required, if a flight nurse who was also a midwife was not available.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: What sort of support services?

Ms CAHILL: A midwife. I do not have the final configuration of the contract, but that is a requirement of the contract, that 24/7 midwifery support is available for all flights. They have advised they are complying with that.

Mr VATSKALIS: If the nurse on the plane that day is not a qualified midwife, somewhere else in the system a midwife would be available.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: A midwife would be called on duty to ...?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is an obligation 24/7 to ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I wanted to ensure when you say support available, that you are not going to pick up a radio microphone.

Ms CAHILL: No, no, they have to get on the plane as well, sorry.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, very much. Going back to the flight crew, what is the response time for the crew for BK 117?

Ms CAHILL: The take off is from Darwin, so the response time from calling the team to arrival at the airport currently is 20 minutes, 30 maximum. I will verify that for certain.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is under the interim contract?

Ms CAHILL: It would be no longer than that, and it may be slightly shorter, depending on the location of the team. I will confirm that. I have the clarification on the fuelling. The helicopter lands at Tindal and fuels at Tindal. There are occasions where they pick up directly from Katherine hospital, but they refuel at Tindal before they go to the hospital. We have been advised of no issues of them landing or taking off from Katherine hospital helipad fully laden. There are other fuel depots around that area where they can land in extreme circumstances. CASA do allow, in extreme emergency circumstances, for a refuelling to occur with a patient on board if time is deemed to be that critical. We are getting the timing of the ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. That concludes my ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you have finished, we need to take that question and answer process on notice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide it before the end of the day.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are happy to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, we are still at 2.1. The shadow minister has asked for more questions at 2.1?

Mr CONLAN: On that aero-med stuff, I know you say it is commercial-in-confidence, but where does the taxpayer see how much is eventually spent on anything which is commercial-in-confidence? How can it eventually be accounted for? Is it a figure which is never revealed? Is it in the budget paper somewhere?

Mr WILSON: The contract price is published on the DBE website when it has been awarded.

Mr CONLAN: Where in the budget papers would that appear?

Mr VATSKALIS: It will not appear.

Mr CONLAN: How do you budget for this if it is commercial-in-confidence?

Mr RYAN: There is a base budget for aeromedical as part of our base funding, if you like. If there is a marked increase because of the contract, there would be submission we would put to Cabinet for consideration.

Mr CONLAN: So, once the contract is awarded, then it can be made public. Is that right?

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: No worries. I did want to just talk about the issue with the unqualified doctor in Alice Springs. I believe that is part of this Output 2.1. Is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is actually generic. Is not ...

Mr CONLAN: It is all about staffing ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Happy to take it.

Mr CONLAN: Can you please tell the committee how it was that an unqualified doctor was able to practice at Alice Springs Hospital for nine months, up until earlier this year? How did the medical registration system fail so badly as to allow him to practice? Can you explain the circumstances surrounding this situation?

Mr VATSKALIS: Now that the court has finished the investigation and he has been sentenced, I have to advise that it was a very well-thought con. The person provided qualifications that were not genuine. He had falsified the qualification. He had falsified qualification that were certified by a JP in South Australia so, went they presented it to the Medical Board in the Northern Territory, the Medical Board accepted it in good faith. For someone to go to that extent; it was not done before.

However, that person started working in Alice Springs Hospital as a trainee doctor. It was picked up very quickly by higher staff, who identified that he did not even have the necessary skills, and alerted Dr Lynch to this effect, and Dr Lynch proceeded immediately to investigate and suspend the doctor.

Immediately, we asked the board to have a look at the internal processes but, again, in the face of the elaborate hoax he played, I do not think anybody would have picked it up by just looking at the documentation, only by looking at what he did..

I also asked the department to have a look and review our system; how we look at the doctors we get. What we do know was actually provided to me last week. I have asked the department to provide me with, in writing, what they are going to do so, if let us say somebody managed to pass the Medical Board registration, we can pick it up ourselves.

One thing that alerted me is that you can have a driving licence which has a number and where it is issued. If you have a university degree - if you go back and look at your degrees, whoever has one – it has no reference number. It has your name and the title you got. I brought that to the attention of the new authority, under the new national scheme, that probably we should discuss with the universities to find a way of registering degrees so, if somebody present themselves with certification, the certifying authority can pick up the phone and question the university. Le us say, Flinders University medical degree No 375 in the name of Kon Vatskalis. Is it true? They can look at their database and say it is true.

That person had a degree which actually, was a genuine degree originally, because he had to finish a science degree of the university. He then changed the title of the degree; instead of a science degree he made it a medical degree.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, will you make the findings of the inquiry ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. I will make the findings of the inquiry and the measures we are going to take to prevent something like that happening in the future.

Mr CONLAN: Can you put on the record how many people were actually treated by this alleged doctor?

Mr WILSON: I am not sure if we actually have that figure here, but we certainly can do that. It is around 400, if you are happy with a round 400, or we can give you the exact number.

Mr CONLAN: Well, if we can get that, that will be good. I believe it was around 400.

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, he did not do it by himself; he was always under supervision of some other doctors because he was a training doctor.

Mr CONLAN: Were all 400 people treated with a fully-qualified doctor?

Mr WILSON: It was a very close process that was gone through. Peter Lynch and another senior doctor in Alice Springs have identified that the care he had done was very much within the role that he thought he was practicing, in terms of a first-year doctor, which relies on very close supervision.

Mr CONLAN: Have those patients who came into contact with this doctor been contacted and made aware they were treated by someone who was not actually a doctor?

Mr WILSON: I will need to confirm that for you. There was a process, been through, exactly how it operated between the DMS and Alice Springs, and the other senior doctor, in terms of reviewing all the patient notes, and well publicised, and I know a lot of patients were contacted, but I do not know whether they all were.

Question on Notice No 7.15

Mr CHAIRMAN: There was actually a Question on Notice back a bit, if you want to do that.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. The question is: how many people were treated by this bogus doctor, this alleged dodgy doctor?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.15.

Question on Notice No 7.16

Mr CONLAN: Also, are you able to provide information whether or not that number of patients, that number, whatever it is, those 400 people, have been contacted by the department, at least the Alice Springs Hospital and told that they were?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.16

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice was that they were, but I will confirm it.

Mr CONLAN: Some might not even be in town.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you said you will make the findings of the inquiry public. When do you intend to do that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will make the findings of the inquiry, together with the measures that the department is going to put in place, public as soon as they are presented to me.

Mr CONLAN: And when do you expect that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Next week.

Mr CONLAN: Next week, okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will get a response next week, so soon afterwards, hopefully.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. All right, very good. I do have some questions about nuclear waste at RDH. I believe ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: ... is this part of 2.1?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It fits under Environmental Health Services, 4.1. The member for Nelson has some questions to that output too.

That concludes consideration of Output 2.1. I am sorry, there are some answers at the back.

Ms CAHILL: I have the clarifications on timing. The refuelling for the helicopter takes 15 minutes. The response time for when the helicopter is tasked in Darwin is 30 minutes, but the anticipation is that that time will reduce in the interim service because of the location of the team and, in an emergency situation, there is the capacity to add another stretcher into the helicopter if we need to. So, if we had a major multiple situation, for example, a bus crash that happened just recently, that if they needed to, they could actually get another stretcher in to assist with evacuating patients.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you very much for providing those answers for me.

Output 2.2 – Non-Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move to Output 2.2, Non-Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions.

Mr CONLAN: I will just move very quickly on this, because we need to move through. Minister, just on your estimates here for non-admitted specialist clinic occasions of service emergency department attendances, how do you arrive at that figure? I am just curious to know how you arrive at the estimate, for 2010-11, for example, it was 195 000. For non-admitted specialist clinic occasions of service, up from 175 400, how does the department come to that figure?

Ms CAHILL: The differential between 2009-10 and 2010-11 and the jump that you see there in the estimate is the result of changes and improvements in practice in our data entry and collection. When

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doing the 2009-10 estimate there has been significant changes in the way in which we record and the timeliness with which our data is entered, so the estimate was done when not all data may potentially have been in there.

Subsequently, we have actually changed our practices and the way in which we get data entry so our estimates are far more accurate than they have been in the past because of the improvement in our data warehouse and our collection. Because the estimate for 2009-10 had already been done, that is not able to be changed.

Mr CONLAN: I see, okay.

Ms CAHILL: So if we ran the estimate today based on the information that is in there now, we would have seen that would have been increased and the subsequent increase between 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11 would have been steadier.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so an improvement of data collection essentially?

Ms CAHILL: Yes. An improvement in process and data collection and timeliness, and an investment into the actual ability to get that information in a timely fashion and an improvement in the way in which the data is collected.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you. Minister, just regarding St John Ambulance, has the St John Ambulance contract to provide road-based ambulance services been renewed following the expiry of the current agreement on 30 June this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Cabinet is being pursued to renew the contract for another three years and St John Ambulance has been advised. However, we had discussions with St John Ambulance to get some governance experts in order to improve their governance and improve their efficiency. We believe that it is appropriate for St John Ambulance to perform that service to the community, the only service provider in the Territory, and we support them in order improve their efficiency and have better governance.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so a three-year contract as of 30 June?

Mr VATSKALIS: Contract and negotiation are currently with my department to analyse.

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to provide the cost per year for that, or for the contract?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is part of the negotiations we are currently having with St John Ambulance, but from 2007 to 2010 we have invested \$44m to St John Ambulance, and we have funded a new 24/7 ambulance based in Palmerston in 2009-10 because of increased demand with the growth in Palmerston and the rural area.

Mr CONLAN: But at this stage you cannot provide the cost of that contract because you are still negotiating?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because I said to you it is part of what we want from St John Ambulance and part of what we will provide to support St John Ambulance; part of the contract may be the support we provide could be an improved telecommunication system and others that would be part of the contract.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the department was advised to commence an assessment of road ambulance services across the Northern Territory post-expiry of the St John Ambulance contract in 2010. Has this occurred?

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Mr VATSKALIS: It will continue; it will be part of the new contract.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask a question that hangs on that?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, look, I wanted to move through this one pretty quick, so over to you, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: What happened to the McKay Report? Was it the Mackay Report or McKay Report? Was it ever made public, were there recommendations in there, and did the government take up those recommendations?

Ms CAHILL: That report that you are referring to was it done in 2004-05?

Mr WOOD: I think so, it was never released, I do not think.

Ms CAHILL: Yes, my understanding is that it has not been. I have not personally seen it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Cabinet have considered that report but it has not been released to the public because it is part of Cabinet deliberations.

Mr WOOD: A long deliberation. Do you think it will be released?

Mr VATSKALIS: Cabinet has made the decision that St John Ambulance is going to be the preferred provider, and we will continue with that, but with improved governance and efficiency.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So you have finished, have you, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Macdonnell, have you any questions of 2.2?

Ms ANDERSON: No.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, Mr Chairman, I have probably three questions also regarding St John Ambulance Australia NT.

Minister, in regard to my discussions with St John and, as you know, I worked there many years ago so I have some understanding of how they operate, the trigger for another crew is about 20 000 people. The rural area is growing fast, as you know and understand, and our population is almost hitting 20 000 if not over, so when is the government going to start to commit seriously funds to the development of a centre down there, bearing in mind that a few years back when the fire station and the police station at Humpty Doo precinct was opened, there was a photograph of the Chief Minister in front of a sign that says 'Ambulance Centre Stage 2'. That is some years ago. Stage two or stage one?

Mr Wood: I have a picture of the sign.

Ms PURICK: The sign has mysteriously disappeared. My question, minister, is when is the government going to consider the people in the rural area equally as people in the urban areas regarding ambulance services?

Mr VATSKALIS: We already have. That is why we are putting a new 24/7 ambulance service in the Palmerston area.

Ms PURICK: That is not the rural area that is Palmerston. That is some 20 km away from Lambells Lagoon.

Mr VATSKALIS: Any future growth in the area will be taken into account as part of the new contract to be provided by St John over the next few years.

Ms PURICK: You do not care about people in the rural area. That is what you are telling them.

Mr VATSKALIS: Hold on, hold on, do not put words in my mouth. We said we agreed with St John that we would have a three year contract until 2013. Part of this contract will be governance and efficiencies, and part of this governance and efficiency will be where and how we expand the service to cater for people all over the Territory, not only in the rural area. We have the growth towns - we have to address issues in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Gove and some of the growth towns.

I do not say we do not care for people in rural area. We care, and that is why we awarded the contract to St John Ambulance, and that is why we say, with St John, we will provide the means to have a look at the current governance model and how to improve their efficiencies.

Ms PURICK: I understand the department is still in negotiations regarding St John and their delivery, so perhaps I need to lobby the board to say part of their discussions should include another crew based in the rural area. I will leave it there for now.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can I ask Robyn Cahill to answer.

Ms CAHILL: Just to let you know at a meeting yesterday with St John's to do our planning processes, we reached agreement that we will spend the next four months doing the modelling and demand requirements based on geography and population, so all that will be taken into consideration.

Ms PURICK: That is good because the police and the fire complex at Humpty Doo do not have scope currently to house an ambulance and crew. It needs expansion, which needs funding from government. Thank you for the answer.

Minister, my other question is regarding the after-care paramedic service provided at the Palmerston Centre which no longer is provided by St John - it is now provided by a company called International SOS. My concern is on 23 January an advertisement was placed in the newspaper by International SOS seeking people to work in that complex, however St John Ambulance were not told until 28 January they were unsuccessful in winning the contract.

My question is was there some insider trading as to why this company got the contract and St John did not? I have evidence of the advertisement in the paper, and when St John was notified. The advertisement appeared in the paper before St John was told they did not have the contract.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a different output; it is under Health and Wellbeing Services, so if you would like to ask ...

Ms PURICK: Take it on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the output ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Under 3.0?

Ms PURICK: Minister, my last question refers to St John, and this is obviously something that concerns all Territorians not just us poor under privileged people in the rural area.

Mr Wood: Do not put us down too much member for Goyder.

Ms PURICK: Pride.

Mr Wood: Wallaby Holtze Road selling land at about \$1.4m a block.

Ms PURICK: No, no that is just the neighbours.

Minister, my land has depreciated considerably because of my neighbour. Us goat farmers appreciate it. Sorry, Mr Chairman.

Minister, my question is about the negotiations and discussions with St John regarding their contract. As you know they have different ways they prioritise their responses. They have code 1, code 2, and code 3. Code 3 is the low priority transporting people from home to hospitals for care and treatment and things of that nature, and I understand it is about 30% of people.

Minister, perhaps we need to consider additional support such that St John can set up what could be called a patient transport system. It is not the normal crew, it may require different vehicles so those vehicles taking people from their homes to the hospital for care, do not go to the accident and emergency centre so it does not clog up that centre, it relieves it at so they can treat more serious people. The required qualified officers can be dealing with the more urgent, serious cases. It also, possibly, has opportunities for more involvement by Indigenous people in the transportation and training opportunities. Would your department consider that as part of the negotiations?

Mr VATSKALIS: As Ms Cahill said, the first thing is to have a look at all of these issues and continue the meetings in order to find out how the system in use will operate, and that will be part of these negotiations.

Ms PURICK: You could see the merit of having a system different to what it is now?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not want to clog an ambulance by transporting somebody who actually does need to go to the emergency, but is not injured ...

Ms PURICK: Well, that is what they have to do currently, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, that is why we are actually looking to improve efficiencies.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES

Output 3.1 – Community Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move to Output Group 3.0, Health and Wellbeing Services, Output 3.1, Community Health Services.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, there is no indication in the budget paper that explains why cuts of some \$5.5m have come out of community health services. Are you able to explain what the cut is for? You will see there, it is \$5.583m.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, there is not an increase in the community health output group of \$5.5m from the last financial year, which is primarily due to the completion of funding agreements from the Australian government, in particular, (inaudible) programs valued at \$9m.

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As the 2010-11 year progresses, negotiations for a new agreement with the Australian government will be complete, which will be added to the budget. Also, there is a federal allocation of \$3m for Australian government programs carried forward (inaudible), and \$4m to CPI and wage indexation. This variation, clearly, is because of the completion of programs funded by the Australian government.

Mr CONLAN: What were those programs, minister, that were completed?

Ms CLEARY: The Commonwealth programs that have ceased in the funding coming into the 2010-11 budget include \$9.6m from the Office of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Health, which is for general support of primary health care in remote health centres, and \$2.4m worth of oral health and hearing services follow-up to child health check associated with the NT Emergency Response. Those are programs which will be funded in 2010-11, but for which agreements are not yet struck.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, that brings me to the oral health then. The \$2.3m dental blitz - was that part of the Commonwealth program that ceased for this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: The \$1.5m to implement the dental blitz was Northern Territory government money. The \$1.5m was to implement the dental blitz, and \$700 000 per year ongoing from 2010-11.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. On that, why has the estimated number of occasions of service for oral health been decreased by 4000 instances, as it says? In 2009-10 it was 49, as you see. In 2010-11 it was 45. Does that mean that you got to those 4000, as it equates to around 4000 appointments?

Mr VATSKALIS: Prior to the commencement of the blitz in 2009, the waiting time was 52 months. By 18 May 2010, this had been reduced to 24 month for more than 90% of the people. The waiting list has not only been slashed, but the number of people also has been reduced from 4525 people to 1355 people. We intend to maintain that number of people ongoing.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, so how many did you do with the blitz? The \$1.5m invested by the Northern Territory government - how many dental appointments did that equate to? It is reduced by 4000 in the budget, so I suppose you would assume that you achieved the 4000 appointment mark.

Ms CLEARY: Jenny Cleary, Executive Director, Health Services. I do not actually have with me the number of appointments that the blitz enabled, but what i can tell you is that, as at 18 May, there were 1355 people waiting for general care, and that was a reduction from 4525 in November of 2009, but not all of those will be actual appointments, but if you subtract 1355 from 4525, you have got the number of people who came off the waiting list.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but does the department actually have that figure somewhere?

Mr VATSKALIS: The patients treated up to the 31 May, 1103 - number of appointments 2347.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry?

Mr VATSKALIS: Two thousand three hundred and forty-seven appointments.

Mr CONLAN: Two thousand three hundred and forty-seven.

Mr VATSKALIS: That was the blitz.

Mr CONLAN: That was the blitz.

Mr VATSKALIS: Some people might have multiple appointments, so while the number of people treated is 1100 ...

Mr CONLAN: So, can we have that? Your aim was 4000 appointments, and so you have got just a little over half so ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, you have to remember also that people miss appointments, people do not turn up.

Mr CONLAN: I certainly understand those anomalies, but I was just wondering whether or not you are able, the department knows exactly where it sits with multiple appointments, or those people that did not turn up, if you have that data at all.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide that. We have to analyse them, because I have got here some information about appointments, but I want to clear it, because it refers to remote, and it refers to mobile, and I think we can provide you this information. I will take it on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you say that as a question on notice then, member for Greatorex?

Question on Notice No 7.17

Mr CONLAN: Minister, can you provide the committee with a breakdown of those appointments where people failed to turn up, and those appointments that were, indeed, multiple appointments?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.17.

Mr CONLAN: And this is to do with the blitz too, by the way, to make that clear.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the 2008-09 reports of vacancy rates for dentists were 40%, dental therapists 30%, have you reduced those vacancy rates?

Mr VATSKALIS: The number of dentists has actually been addressed. For dental therapists, it is difficult hiring, for example, we have got nine in the Top End; 11 positions for dentists. We have three vacancies. In the Centre, we have five dentists, no vacancies.

In dental therapists in the Top End, we have 17, and the vacancies is 3.6 full-time equivalent; in Central Australia, we have got two dental therapists and no vacancies. Alice Springs seems to be handling the dental issues better than Darwin.

Mr WOOD: I needed to know, because I have not been here yet, so I could get one of those dentists so I could see him straight away. That is all right, so the rates are reduced.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, in the budget speech, it says, 'keeping people out of hospital is just as important and it is expected that in 2010-11, \$112m will be spent on preventative health initiatives'. Are you able to give us a breakdown of those initiatives and where that money will be spent, the \$112m? And, in the interests of time, I am happy for that to be tabled or taken on notice.

Ms CLEARY: What we have brought with us is qualitative information about preventative health, so the breakdown quantitatively is not in front of me. It is obviously available. It is a complex methodology that takes apart every cost centre in the department, which is hundreds and hundreds, as you can imagine, and apportions a percentage of that that is spent on prevention. So, for example,

we might say that, perhaps among, say, the dental therapists, just using oral health as an example and this is hypothetical; the dental therapists might spend 10% of their time doing preventive dentistry versus restorative dentistry, in which case we would take 10% of that. So, at the end of the day, the amount of money the department spends on prevention is in addition to hundreds of proportions of cost centres.

Mr CONLAN: Right, so it is not really a stand-alone figure as such?

Ms CLEARY: It is a total, but it comes from hundreds of additions is what I am explaining.

Mr CONLAN: Are there measures: say, anti-smoking, drinking, healthy eating and that type of thing, come under this \$112m figure?

Ms CLEARY: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Do you have a breakdown of that, perhaps the government is doing? Just the programs and where the money is.

Ms CLEARY: Yes, and not easily at the fingertips, but we could provide information about the nutrition and physical activity budget, the tobacco and other substances budget, etcetera.

Mr VATSKALIS: And supporting other organisations, non-government organisations. Recently we supported AMSANT to run the fresh fruit (inaudible) in the Barkly. We actually fund the physical activity forums, one in Katherine and one in Darwin to promote healthy living and preventative health in remote communities. So it is not only an activity done by the department, but also funded activities for NGOs.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but I think it would be interesting to see where that \$112m is going on preventative health, and if we could get a breakdown of it.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can take the question on notice and we can provide it later.

Mr CONLAN: When 60% of the health budget is on Indigenous related issues, and people in those communities have very poor health outcomes, to see what the government is doing, what initiatives are out there, and where that significant amount of money, \$112m, is going for preventative health.

Question on Notice No 7.18

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you repeat the question for the purposes of Hansard, please?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, can you provide the committee with a breakdown of the \$112m earmarked for preventative health?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.18.

Mr CONLAN: In the interests of time I think we will skip that and I will hand over to the Independent.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have a question at 3.1 – Community Health Services?

Mr WOOD: I think I have probably done that in relation to the dentist. I had some other questions, but I will pass it over to the member for Macdonnell.

Ms ANDERSON: I was just going to carry on from the shadow's comments on preventative health,

and you have just stated that there was a conference held at Tennant Creek to talk about ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Fresh food.

Ms ANDERSON: ... healthy living and anti-tobacco campaigns. What was the cost of that meeting run by AMSANT at Tennant Creek?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have been advised we were actually one of the sponsors of this forum, and we can provide the figures for the forum. I do not have that in front of me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: On notice?

Ms ANDERSON: Can I put that on notice? And I have a quick follow-up question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Put that first question on notice.

Ms ANDERSON: The cost of the meeting held by the Northern Territory government in partnership with AMSANT at Tennant Creek.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, just to clarify, we were a sponsor.

Ms ANDERSON: Oh, you sponsored it, okay, so the AMSANT meeting at Tennant Creek, the cost of the meeting.

Mr VATSKALIS: To sponsor it?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide only the figure for how much we sponsored it.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay, what about the travel costs for people coming to the meeting?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was not ours. We actually did not sponsor ...

Ms ANDERSON: ... the only reason I asked is because we know ...

Question on Notice No 7.19

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is going to sound pedantic, but you will not actually have that as a question; so we just need a question.

Ms ANDERSON: How much was the sponsorship?

Mr VATSKALIS: Of the fresh food summit in the budget?

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.19.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have just been advised it is \$10 000.

Ms ANDERSON: \$10 000?

Mr CHAIRMAN: So we scrap that question.

Ms ANDERSON: The reason I ask this, minister, is we have known for years, and Jenny knows this because we have been on joint partnerships with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory government forever, and we still seem to be on this joint partnership forever.

If you start looking at freight costs to Aboriginal communities, you will get people eating healthy and living healthy with fruit and vegetables. At the moment, even Outback Stores is not delivering what you wanted Outback Stores to deliver. You have just had a major report say the shops run by Outback Stores are not delivering what they are supposed to. No healthy fruit. People are not eating healthier. We need to look at freight costs, because if we can subsidise freight cost into communities we will get people eating healthy, and eating more fruit and vegetables. That is the big factor in remote Aboriginal communities, and we know that. Jenny has been sitting on committees for the last 13 years.

Mr VATSKALIS: I absolutely agree with you member, for Macdonnell. Unfortunately the Health department cannot influence the federal government to subsidise fuel or cut taxes for food in communities. We tried our best, but I agree with you, I find it incredible that a can of Coca Cola will cost the same in Darwin as it will cost in a remote community, but an apple in Darwin costs 50 cents and \$3.50 in Ngukurr. Again, we try our best, but there is only so much we can influence the federal government. That is clearly a federal government issue, but we are on the same wave length.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, what I am saying is Jenny Cleary has been sitting on committees with me for the last 13 years talking about this issue to do with medical services. At the end of the day, it makes the health - this is about primary healthcare and preventative help. We need to get things right, and if there is that possibility for us to influence the Commonwealth to make things better so we can start getting better health statistics for the future, then this is where it has to be.

Mr VATSKALIS: The other thing, wearing my other hat, you do not have to import fresh fruit; you can grow fresh fruit in your own community. Through the department of Primary Industries we are teaching people to have market gardens, looking after chooks, or anything else. It does not have to come from Darwin, you can grow it in Ngukurr, and you can grow it in Hermannsburg. You do not have to rely on food from outside your community. It was done before, it can be done again.

Mr WOOD: You have to pay the right people. It will not happen without that.

Mr VATSKALIS: I think Ali Curung is a good example. You train the right people.

Mr WOOD: The trouble is Ali Curung does not employ many locals. That is the report from the CTC unfortunately.

Ms PURICK: Minister, a question was asked before about the paramedic care, or after care at Palmerston health centre. St John previously had the contract, and it was extended for a period of months. My concern is there was an ad placed in the newspaper, 23 January, seeking people to fill the positions St John previously filled, by a company International SOS, yet St John were told on 28 January they were not successful in the contract.

How is it that company knew to put ads in the paper, yet St John were not told until 28 January. Was there some kind of insider trading, or some kind of Intel, the government wanted this company and did not want St John?

Ms CLEARY: I know what you are talking about. It certainly was a bit surprising for us to see that ad in the paper. That company jumped the gun; they did not have any indication from the department

they had won the tender at that point. All letters went out to successful and unsuccessful tenderers on the same day.

Ms PURICK: I will leave it at that. It seems very strange that they were that presumptuous. It does not go good for their management. Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 - Community Health Services. We now move to Output 3.2 – Mental Health Services.

Output 3.2 – Mental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow Minister.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, similar information about available beds, available bed days, total bed days, bed occupancy rates. We do not have to go through that; perhaps if you could take it on notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have that information at hand, so we have to take it on notice.

Mr CONLAN: And occupancy rates, so the percentage. I want available bed days, total bed days and bed occupancy rates.

Ms HENDRY: I can give you that.

Mr CONLAN: I thought in the interests of time, instead of reading it out, are you able to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: You can either table it or you can answer it now.

Mr CONLAN: You can do it, yes. There are only 25 minutes to go and a bit to get through.

Ms HENDRY: I may as well give it because that will ...

Mr CONLAN: Take up more time.

Ms HENDRY: Well, it is easier just to give it than have someone rewrite it out, as well.

Mr CONLAN: But can we ...

Ms ANDERSON: I cannot hear.

Mr CONLAN: We will ask for a copy of it anyway.

Ms ANDERSON: You have to get her to speak up, to stop slurring.

Ms HENDRY: Sorry?

Ms ANDERSON: I said you need to speak up so we can all hear you.

Ms HENDRY: Sorry, Bronwyn Hendry, Director of Mental Health.

Ms ANDERSON: Sounds like a drunk – a slur like a drunk. I am not saying you are a drunk; just that you slur ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I just think we can say that, then we can table it.

Ms HENDRY: All right, we will just give it to you in a moment.

Mr CONLAN: That will be very helpful, thank you. We will table it anyway. If we could just ask for it to be tabled.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have that in a format ...

Ms HENDRY: Well, it is in various bits ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is not a form that can be tabled.

Ms HENDRY: ... so I will have to actually compile it.

Question on Notice No 7.19

Mr CHAIRMAN: So, it has to be done as a question on notice then.

Mr CONLAN: Would you please provide the committee with information on occupancy rate of mental health beds for each hospital; that is, available beds, available bed days, total bed days, and bed occupancy rate?

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.19.

Answers to Question Nos 7.6, 7.7, 7.9 and 7.14

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, I have some answers for questions on notice before - 7.6, 7.7, 7.9, and 7.14. I am happy to table them.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No worries, thank you very much.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are welcome.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, how many instances of services are provided in Royal Darwin Hospital to prisoners of Darwin Correction Centre?

Mr VATSKALIS: I suppose you are referring to mental health?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.20

Mr CONLAN: In that case I will expand on that. Would you be able to provide the total percentage of bed occupancy or total bed days utilised by Darwin Correctional Centre prisoners?

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.20.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, some of the people missed it. Hansard got the question, but some of the people ...

Mr CONLAN: Well, actually it might be easier this way because the next one. How many instances of service are provided by Royal Darwin Hospital and Alice Springs Hospital to prisoners of Darwin Correctional Centre and the Alice Springs Correctional Centre, and what would be the total percentage of bed occupancy or total bed days utilised by Darwin Correctional Centre prisoners and Alice Springs Correctional Centre prisoners?

Mr CHAIRMAN: And to clarify the issue, is that the people who are listening to the TV to get the question on notice to get the answer during the Estimates Committee are missing it at times when it is read. That is why I was asking.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think Hansard have got it because they get to play the tape back, but the people listening to the TV trying to get the answers out the back are sometimes missing it.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, no worries.

Mr VATSKALIS: Just to clarify, inpatients?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: For mental health?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, for mental health.

Mr CHAIRMAN: And that was 7.20 still? That was not a new one?

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Minister, the Secure Care facilities; are you able to give us an update on that - the \$5.9m, I think, stated throughout – I do not have it; the figures are here somewhere. I know the latest is - you rode in on the white horse, again, to suggest they now be moved. Is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Actually, it was in the other Camry I rode. I went in there and I had a look, personally at both facilities in Alice Springs and in Darwin. I formed the view that not only the reaction of the people but, also, the areas were inappropriate for various reasons. I asked the department to have a look at different facilities. Now, the Alice Springs one will move away from where it was proposed; it will go to Old Mount Plains, the old Bowen Springs Station, and the one in Bees Creek will go to Holtz.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Before anything is established, further consultation with people who may live around will take place.

Mr CONLAN: All right, very good. That is good news.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions, member for Macdonnell?

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I thank you for listening to people and changing the facilities to go where it is not in a built-up area.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are welcome.

Ms ANDERSON: Just on secure facilities, I have a couple of questions. As you can see, I have put a line, because I was going to ask you questions on the consultation process, and this is coming straight from the people that I represented in parliament with the petition.

One of the questions that I have is, what research can you point to that led to your decision to start funding secure care facilities?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, the reason we have to have secure care facilities is because they are brought up time after time after time in court, when actually we cannot keep people, that they need treatment. These are not criminals, these are people actually with severe mental problems, or develop a prognosis in an accident, that, because of their condition, they stop taking their drugs and their health would deteriorate, and we have to put them in a place where we can look after them. until we establish a pattern of treatment through medication in order to rehabilitate back into the community.

It has to be somewhere near a community, it cannot be in the middle of nowhere, because our purpose is actually how to rehabilitate them back to the community.

Ms ANDERSON: Was this triggered by any kind of research, is the question that I am asking, minister, was there any research done?

Ms CLEARY: Both in the Families and Children's division, and in my division through the Mental Health and the Age and Disability program, there was extensive literature review and look at how these issues are dealt with in other jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions have facilities such as these, and it was a missing piece of our services system.

Mr VATSKALIS: And one thing I want to add, I mean, I was asked many times in the media, how I would like to have one in my back yard. But as a matter of fact, I have got one very close to my house, where it is actually a house that has a number of people with mental problems. They are looked after by a non-government organisation. I did not even know it was there until I became the minister, and I asked for a briefing about these kinds of facilities, I found one was about 250 metres from my house.

Ms ANDERSON: The only reason why I am asking these questions is, what about the health service and the network support systems that we already have in place outside of this new facility? What will happen to these organisations, or people who are delivering the service now? What will happen to them, and how much money will be drawn away from these services?

Ms CLEARY: Those are services that we still absolutely need. They are sort of, I guess, lower level security supported accommodation, and they provide a whole range of therapeutic services that our clients still require. The secure care is just for a point in time in, you know, some of the clients lives where they need to be contained in order to get through their therapeutic courses.

Mr VATSKALIS: In secure care facilities, not only the facilities that will be established in Alice Springs and Darwin outside the hospital, there will actually be beds in the hostel as well. So, there will be five in Darwin, six in Alice Springs, and that will be in the hospital grounds, and the other will be secure facilities outside the hospital grounds.

Ms ANDERSON: Yes, but minister, there are people that look after people with mental illness outside of a secure facility. I have got a cousin that is actually in that area, and he has been in that area for years. So what does that mean for him? Does he then go into the secure facility and no longer mix with normal society, or will he stay where he is?

Mr VATSKALIS: In the hospital, we put people who really need to be treated. In the secure facility, we put people that actually have a problem, but they fail to maintain their medication and, because of that, they develop other aggressiveness or behaviours that can harm themselves. These will be the people that will go there. People actually currently receiving care outside these facilities will continue to do so, and no organisation will lose money. These are all new monies for the new facilities.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay, thank you, minister. The other question is, will secure care facilities hold people who would otherwise go into the criminal justice system as well as people who would otherwise go into the health and social services? Will the secure care facilities be used to house people who would otherwise go to Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre, prison, or volatile substance use people?

Ms CLEARY: Predicting exactly who will be in there is difficult. The clients that we know already, that are, you know, almost queued, if you like, to go in when we have got these up and running, are not clients of the criminal justice system or the Don Dale system, so the young people will be people who are in need of protection, as opposed to detention for crimes.

Ms ANDERSON: Is it the juveniles who have mental illness, or just those that need protection?

Ms CLEARY: Generally speaking, they would be young people who are making unsafe decisions and who are difficult for foster parents or foster families to control.

Ms ANDERSON: Okay. Another question, minister, what will limit the length of stays in these facilities, and who will oversight the operation of these facilities?

Ms CLEARY: We are still working on the admission and the discharge processes relating to the facilities. In terms of the second tier, the 16 beds in remote rural Alice Springs and the 16 beds in the Top End, there will be a panel of health professionals who would make decisions about when people need the service and when people can leave the service, or are ready to be re-integrated into the community. In addition to that, the adult guardian for the adults would need to be happy with that as their service option and, in addition to that a magistrate would need to decide it was appropriate to kurb their freedom for that period of time in order to have them use the facility.

Ms ANDERSON: Minister, will there be any legislative changes?

Ms CLEARY: Yes, there will need to be legislation to enable the containment, to balance the human rights and the therapeutic needs.

Ms ANDERSON: Thank you, minister.

Mr WOOD: Minister, does the department employ any psychologists specifically for remote areas in the Northern Territory?

Ms HENDRY: Bronwyn Hendry, Director of Mental Health. We do provide psychologists to provide services in the remote areas, although most of our staff who work full-time in the remote mental health specialist teams, are either nursing staff augmented by visiting medical specialists, and some psychology visiting services. But, generally speaking, the majority of the team are nurses.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you think there is a need, considering some of the issues out in remote areas especially with regards to suicide, that the government does employ full-time psychologist or psychologists in remote communities, for remote communities?

Ms HENDRY: There are a number of initiatives at the moment that are increasing the use of allied health staff in remote communities. Some of those are federal government initiatives, including the

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Rural and Remote Services initiative, so they fund some non-government agencies to provide allied health services to clusters of communities. We have, I think three at the moment in the Territory, three clusters. We are also diversifying our teams to employ not only psychologists but occupational therapists and social workers. It is a very progressive process. I know that particularly the community control sector is very keen to have a psychologist in each remote community but, in terms of workforce issues and the pragmatics of achieving that, it would be a very long-term goal.

Mr VATSKALIS: But from 20 August 2010, we have a Territory-wide 24-hour telephone service, so people in the community can actually contact and find out about people if they present themselves, or they can present at the clinics with mental health problems.

Mr WOOD: My understanding of psychiatrists in remote areas is one that sits down and talks to people one-on-one or families one-on-one. That is all my questions.

Ms PURICK: I just have one question. Minister, the Mental Health Carers NT, is a group I am sure you are familiar with. They are a non-government organisation that provides invaluable support to patients and also the people who care for people with mental health issues. They have a respite house, they provide the creation of support, and a group of them utilise my meeting room on a weekly basis for carers, so I am familiar with their operations and the need for the services they provide.

By the department's own admission in their secure care facility application for development, there is a growing need to have facilities and services for people with mental health issues across the board. My question is, and I know that the government already supports this group, and I know they get some support from the Commonwealth government to deliver their services; my question is: I understand they have made approaches to you about trying to secure a measly \$500 000 to go into a facility on Dick Ward Drive near the tower, which has become available, so that they can house all of their office, their support services, some of their patient services in one facility.

My question is, if the government can find tens of millions of dollars to give to the turf club, surely you can find \$500 000 in additional funding to support this invaluable non-government organisation and the services they deliver. I am not trying to pre-empt discussions you might have with them, but my working with some of the people, and some people in my electorate, it is a huge need and not too much money.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mental health carers and (inaudible) tune of nearly \$300 000 a year (inaudible) funding.

Ms PURICK: That is right, that is not a large amount of money when you give \$12m to the turf club.

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly we are very happy to look at this, but also we would point out to them Commonwealth funding authorities where they can secure some funding from there. I am happy to discuss this issue with them again, and look at how we can help to get some money out of the Commonwealth, not only the Territory.

Ms PURICK: I do not disagree, minister, but it would be in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness if all their operations could be housed in one location, which is available now, and as I understand, it would suit their operation. They have got an office here, they have some support stuff being done at St Peters Church Hall, which they have to pack up every time and shut down. Is it very destabilising for a group of people.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would be happy to continue a discussion with them and see if we can find a way to help them.

Ms PURICK: It may be a combination of their effort and your effort to go to the Commonwealth.

Mr VATSKALIS: It could be also that \$0.5m might be - a government building could accommodate

them. It is not only giving the money out, let us find the best solution for them, how they can all be together and how we can assist them.

Ms PURICK: Thank you, minister, it is a vital service. Thank you Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output 3.3, and I believe the member for Sanderson is the shadow.

Mr WILSON: Can I make a comment on the record, I am aware this is all on Hansard. As the acting Chief Executive, I need to get on record my concern about the comment that Alison made. I appreciate it was made ad hoc, and was not meant to harm. We have absolute integrity, confidence, and competence in our director of Mental Health. I need that on the record. I am sure that was not an offence.

Ms ANDERSON: Exactly, and I withdraw, minister, and apologise. I said it was like a drunken slur. I did not mean anything on you.

Mr WILSON: Absolutely, and there is no question about that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee welcomes that clarification.

Mr WILSON: I thank you Alison, I appreciate it was not meant with malice at all.

Mr STYLES: In relation to Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability with a Budget 2009-10 allocation of \$72.215m, and Budget 2010-11, \$73.873m, which is an increase of 2.29%. Given Treasury's projected figures for inflation in 2010 is 3.1%, and the inflation rate in 2011 is 3.4%, are you aware there are a considerable number of non-government organisation service providers in the area of disability provision which are suffering cutbacks, and given the current budget does not keep pace with inflation, there is a real issue, in dollar value, of these people receiving even less. Are you aware of the cutbacks these NGOs are suffering?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member, the 2009-10 estimate was \$72m, the 2010-11 budget is \$73m, you say a variation of about \$1.6m increase. You have to remember Budget 2009-10 included \$2.7m programs that were carried forward in 2008-09. That is the only reason why the figure is elevated. The \$1.6m not only increased - that \$73m includes - is much bigger than 2009-10 because 2009-10 had extra money transferred from the year before. In addition, there will be \$1.4m coming to the budget because it is fee for service based so it increases more than \$1.6m, it would be at least \$2m. That was significantly higher than the estimate of 2009-10, which should have been about \$69m rather than \$72m.

Mr STYLES: Given that is the explanation, why is that non-government service providers are suffering cutbacks? I give you an example. I have spoken to many of them and just one ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I know you wrote to them. We have a copy of the letters.

Mr STYLES: The arthritis and osteoporosis service - their board is actually considering closure at this point in time as an option because, with their cutbacks, they are looking at either the staff going or the rent going, and they have two part-time staff. The board is actually considering closure. That is just one and, given the time factor here, I will not go into the others.

Ms CLEARY: We are not aware of any reductions in non-government organisational funding. We do pass on the CPI to non-government organisations, so there must be additional costs that have hit that

organisation if they are finding now they cannot do their normal business with that amount of money. We are not aware of that would be, at this stage.

Mr STYLES: Thank you. I will make them aware of the answer to those questions.

Ms CLEARY: Just one more comment about that. They are part-funded by the Commonwealth government. I am not sure whether the Commonwealth government has sustained its funding in the way we have.

Mr STYLES: I am aware there is some Commonwealth funding there. If the Commonwealth was to cease that funding and services like this one were to close, would the government consider assisting these organisations to keep their doors open?

Mr VATSKALIS: Certainly, they are valuable organisations to the community. Our government will consider the need to exist and, certainly, we will be discussing with them how much funding they need from us. We will advocate on their behalf to the Commonwealth to maintain funding.

Mr STYLES: Excellent, thanks, minister. Next question is in relation to post-school options for parents with children with a disability. Is there any budget allocation for this particular issue, as a lot of these parents - some of them - are unable to go back to work because there are no options once these kids leave school?

Ms FIELDING: Penny Fielding, Director Age and Disability Program. I can provide the budget for day options including post-school options on notice. Certainly, in both Darwin and Alice Springs, there are vacancies in the day options programs. I will certainly be happy for some parents to be referred to our office through the Office of Disability 1800 number, and we can go through that process with them.

Question on Notice No 7.21

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you repeat that question for the record?

Mr STYLES: In relation to post school options for parents with children with disabilities, is there any budget allocation for this particular issue?

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.21.

Mr STYLES: In relation to supported accommodation, many people in supported accommodation - with disabilities that is - are recorded under Category C in relation to taxi allowances, which is about \$560 per year, I am led to believe. This does not appear to give those people many opportunities to get out and about as other people in the community can. Is there any proposal to review those on Category C in that situation, and move them to Category B, which is about \$1785, thus giving them far more options to get out and about and enjoy community events.

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is these are outcomes under the DPI, so the appropriate minister to answer the question will be the minister who is responsible for DPI.

Mr STYLES: It is community support services for people with a disability. These people have a disability, and this is the community support service we provide. I would have thought it would have come under this category, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: For these people with a disability, unfortunately the budget comes from DPI. They administer the program.

Mr STYLES: I am not saying that is the line item. So, you do not want to answer this one?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well I cannot because it is not my budget. It is DPI, Planning and Infrastructure budget.

Mr STYLES: This, again, are concerns from people with a disability under Community Support Services. People who receive concerns. This is more something you might be able to do for these people because they have raised it with me. Centrelink is sending out letters to people in the community with disabilities. Some are going to be managed and some are not - in relation to their income. Would you be prepared to take that on for these people and, perhaps, write to the Commonwealth? I will certainly be doing that, to try to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I certainly will be doing that on a case-by-case, I mean, I do not know the cases yet, they have not come to me, but if they come to me and I find out that they are actually disadvantaged unfairly, I am prepared to write to the Commonwealth.

Mr STYLES: I will encourage them to do that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mr STYLES: Thank you, minister.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, can we whiz through to get to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not asking questions.

Mr CONLAN: No, okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So, you are finished with output 3.3?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do have you any questions for output 3.3?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3, Community Support Services for Frail Aged and People with a Disability.

Output 3.4 – Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions

Mr CHAIRMAN: No questions? That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0, Health and Wellbeing Services.

Output Group 4.0 – PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Output 4.1 - Environmental Health Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output Group 4.0, Public Health Services, Output 4.1, Environmental Health Services. Are there any questions for that?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, minister, on nuclear waste storage, just to get through this pretty quickly, not the waste dump, this is the storage at Royal Darwin Hospital. Minister, how much waste from nuclear medicine is stored at Royal Darwin Hospital? And again, for time, happy to take these on notice, or if you can provide them at some point.

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Mr VATSKALIS: Well, as you probably know, and you have probably seen the photos, the room where we store this so-called nuclear waste is very small, and that so-called nuclear waste incorporates gloves, material, clothing that we use when we do radiation.

Mr CONLAN: I understand.

Mr VATSKALIS: The approximate volume is 2.3 m³.

Mr CONLAN: 2.3 m³, okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Now, a radiation survey is undertaken regularly to find out what is happening. All the (inaudible) level that has been fully checked to date, they are coming up to standards, and as I said before, I would be happy to stand outside that room, because I am absolutely confident that it is not going to affect me or any person.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, in the past five years, to where has waste from the nuclear medicine at the hospital been transferred?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, some of the radiation rods have been transported back to Sydney to be irradiated and regenerated. Some of the others have got a very short shelf life and they decay very quickly, so they can actually be disposed of appropriately.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Minister, are there any other sites across the Territory where nuclear waste from the hospitals is stored?

Mr VATSKALIS: There are not any. There used to be some radioactive equipment in some of the mine sites, but they have been removed about two or three years ago.

Mr CONLAN: You said 2.3 m³, is that the total of hospital waste across the Northern Territory stored everywhere? I think you answered that, you said there is no other location so, it is really only at RDH?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: That is it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can I refer you to Xavier Schobben, Director, Environmental Health?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr SCHOBHEN: Yes, that is correct. There is only one facility at Royal Darwin Hospital, which is the Northern Territory government interim storage facility.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I just wanted to get a few facts and figures on that, so happy to move on, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, have you any questions on this output?

Mr WOOD: Have we got time? What is our finishing time?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, we were meant to finish ...

Mr WOOD: I will leave it with the shadow. I do have questions, but I am happy to leave it.

Mr CONLAN: I want to get to non-specific pretty quickly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just to clarify for witnesses, we have an informal time sharing arrangement and a roster, and we were going to finish with the Department of Health at 2.30 pm and start Primary Industry, so the question is about how much time we go over.

Mr WOOD: I have plenty of questions for 4.2, but I have a specific question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, you are welcome to, you have got the call if you want to ask a question now, but that was the roster.

Mr WOOD: That is all right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: And you do have time up your sleeve out of your allocation.

Mr WOOD: I know that. I am happy for the shadow to move along.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions for Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 – Disease Control Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output 4.2, Disease Control Services. Are there any questions on Output 4.2, Disease Control Services?

Mr CONLAN: Happy to move on from there.

Mr WOOD: Minister, on page 125 of the annual report, it says, 'Children fully immunised is estimated to be, in 2009-10, to be between 91% at 12 months and 93% at two years'. Why do we have less than 100%, and are some children immunised for some diseases and not others, like some immunised for whooping cough and not polio, and as one who had polio, I am very concerned if we are not getting 100% of children immunised against polio?

Mr VATSKALIS: The generic answer is because people miss their kid's immunisation, then we have got people that actually object to immunisation, which I think is crazy, but I will let my Chief Health Officer respond to that.

Dr PATERSON: Barbara Paterson, Executive Director, Health Protection and Chief Health Officer. The Northern Territory does have high immunisation coverage rates, it is something we are very proud of, and we put a lot of effort in. As the Minister for Health says, not everyone will take their children for vaccinations, but when you get over the 90%, you are getting good immunity for the community, so the individual benefits and the whole population benefits, and we do put a lot of resources and effort into promoting vaccination and improving the timeliness of them as well.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you have any idea what the 7% who are immunised is in numbers?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, but I suppose we can find out. We can take it on notice.

Mr WOOD: You might even have a ball park figure. Are we talking hundreds of children?

Dr MARKEY: Peter Markey, Acting Director of Centre for Disease Control. The birth cohort in the Northern Territory is about 3500, so it would be 7% of that, so that is how you work it out. So it is 35 x 7.

Mr WOOD: It is still a fair number of children.

Dr MARKEY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: And so is there a program to try and reduce that even further?

Dr MARKEY: From a temporal aspect, the rates nationally have been going up, so while we would always like it to be more, these rates are good looking at the trend data. We also do very well compared to the rest of the country, and in particular with the logistic barriers we have in place, with remoteness and our supply of vaccine etcetera, we do better than the rest of the country. So, we are always looking at ways at bettering our coverage, including education programs and combating all the myths out there about immunisation. But for many people it is sometimes a time factor, parents just do not get the time to do it, so we have to try and reinforce the benefits. As the Chief Health Officer said, with many diseases, you do not have to have 100% coverage to stop transmission, and that would be the case with polio, I would imagine, and things like measles as well.

Mr WOOD: One more question, and I hope I have it in the right place, I presume it is the department that checks the water in Howard Springs, and there has been a lot of money spent on cleaning up Howard Springs and we still cannot ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That was Output 4.1 Environmental Health.

Mr WOOD: Okay. The only other question is in relation to melioidosis. What is concerning, and it has been brought to my attention in the rural area, that out of 60 bores, 30% are shown to have melioidosis in it, and I gather that Mark Mayer, through the Menzies School of Health, is doing a lot of work.

Is the government monitoring melioidosis, especially in the rural area, and is there any connection between drinking water or even the use of water in a bore that is found to have melioidosis could give a person melioidosis?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Peter to respond to that one.

Dr MARKEY: There has been at least one episode in the Northern Territory where there melioidosis was found in the drinking water, and associated, and that was connected with melioidosis the disease. But as far as our advice goes, as you are aware, it is still at the research stage, we are looking at bore contamination and it is with Menzies. We do not have a screening program in place for bores in the rural areas around Darwin, but we do give advice to people about bores and what they might do. I am happy to provide that advice.

Mr WOOD: If it came to the crunch, can you boil water to rid the melioidosis?

Mr MARKEY: I could not be certain about that. My thinking is it would get rid of melioidosis, but we usually give advice that water chlorination is the best approach. It is not just drinking; it can be (inaudible) through showering and things. With people who live in the rural areas, if they do have immune problems – you might be aware melioidosis is pretty well exclusively people with immune deficiencies, so people with immune deficiencies need to consider chlorination.

That is basically the advice we give.

Mr WOOD: One thing I hate about Darwin water is taste. I add chlorine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2. We will now move on to Output 4.3 – Alcohol and other Drug Services.

Output 4.3 – Alcohol and other Drug Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you Mr Chair. I have a stack of questions, however I will keep it to a couple. Minister, the utilisation rates of sobering-up shelter bed hours is at 31% for 2009-10, and again for 2010-11. That strikes me at quite low. Are you able to expand on that, or elaborate as to why it is only at 31%? This in light of comments made by the Treasurer that 59% of violent crime in the Territory is alcohol related; it costs the Territory financially \$642m a year. We all know the problems relating to alcohol, yet we are only seeing 31% of those beds utilised. Are you able to elaborate on that?

Ms TOWNSEND: The sobering-up shelter utilisation rate is a figure derived from the total opening hours of each sobering-up shelter by its bed capacity, and by admissions. What the figure shows is not necessarily that the sobering-up shelters have unused capacity, it shows the utilisation rate of those sobering-up shelters at points in time.

Mr CONLAN: Their opening hours, their capacity, equates to 31%.

Ms TOWNSEND: They are fully utilised 31% of the time. However, that probably reflects the number of beds they have and the admission characteristics of each of those SUSs. For example, we know in Alice Springs the sobering up shelter is particularly busy from 4 pm to say 11 pm, and that is probably a feature of the opening hours in Alice Springs, and also the referral patterns of the police and the patrols that take people there. Because they have a finite number of beds, those services will be fully utilised for that period. We also know they have periods before and after the six hour admission period where they are not well used.

Mr CONLAN: In other words, it is at peak capacity of 31% of the time.

Minister, admissions to sobering-up shelters, how do you arrive at those figures? You have an estimate of 18 000, and again this coming financial year of 18 000 admissions. Is that based on past admissions and you estimating the same through the doors again, or how do you come to that figure.

Ms TOWNSEND: We have been recording sobering-up shelter admissions for many, many years, and the estimate of admissions is based on trend data over time. What we were observing is a reduction in SUS admissions - a very long term but gradual reduction. We have seen some reversal of that trend, so we will revise our estimate for next year. We were looking at a trend, but have seen a reduction from the early 2000s. We have seen some increase in those admissions in the last couple of years so we will revise our estimate.

Mr CONLAN: Do you know where that estimate will be going?

Ms TOWNSEND: Yes, we are predicting, based on our full year estimate for 2009-10, that the admissions will be 20 771, which is about 400 more than last financial year.

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to give the occupancy rates of those sobering-up shelters? Provide those on notice even

Ms TOWNSEND: What we have is the SUS utilisation rate, which I appreciate is ...

Mr CONLAN: What is the SUS?

Ms TOWNSEND: The sobering-up shelter utilisation rate, which is an expression of that. We would have to think through the methodology of occupancy.

Mr CONLAN: You do not keep that data?

Ms TOWNSEND: We actually have a pretty rich database around the sobering-up shelter in referral payments and admissions, so we may be able to, but we may have to apply some thinking. I do not

have that with me.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Question on Notice No 7.22

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that going on notice? Please repeat the question.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. If possible, could the department please provide the occupancy rates for sobering-up shelters across the Territory? All of it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of Hansard, I allocate that question No 7.22.

Mr CONLAN: There is a whole lot more here, but I know we have to keep going. I have to get to the other one, so ...

A WITNESS: If you require a briefing after the estimates, I am happy to give you one.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, certainly. It has been an ongoing briefing with alcohol, anyway.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any more questions for Output 4.3, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services?

Mr WOOD: No. I have, but I am not asking them.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 4.3, Alcohol and Other Drugs Services.

Output 4.4 – Health Research

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move on to Output 4.4, Health Research.

Mr CONLAN: Nothing for me.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration for - no sorry no, it does not. Do you have a non-output specific budget questions, shadow minister?

Mr CONLAN: Yes. I hope I saved it for the right thing. Can you please explain, in the capitol works, the revoted works for the Department of Health and Families; the fire protection and air-conditioning remediation. I understand it is, no doubt, a big job and it probably is expensive, but I am sure you would appreciate that, last year, it was \$711 000 and this year, you have allocated \$38m. It is, essentially, \$37m extra for the work required at the Alice Springs Hospital. I know there are some issues in the past with that, but are you able to elaborate or explain that very significant increase?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our problem is with the situation at Alice Springs Hospital is that, currently, we are under litigation with the company that performed the so-called remedial work. We have to actually address each work separately, and we have to be counted from one place to another, and that will take time. Also we keep looking for things and will keep finding things that they will not find.

Mr CONLAN: Is it possible to provide the community with a breakdown of the costs there or ...

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said, we cannot because we keep looking and we keep finding things that actually are not up to scratch, and ...

Mr CONLAN: You have allocated the money, so you must have some idea on what it is going to

cost? You are, obviously, derived this figure somehow. Are you able to provide the community with how you have come up with this extra \$37m?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we can take it on notice and provide you and the committee with a breakdown ...

Question on Notice No 7.23

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Would you please provide the committee with a breakdown of the amount allocated for fire protection, air-conditioning and remediation which, this year, is to the tune of \$38.346m and ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It was \$38.3m and in 2008-09, an additional \$32.9m was allocated.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, you have that. Rectifications works, \$32.9m, but the total figure here is \$38.346m. The total figure for the program is \$38.346m. At least that is what is said in the infrastructure budget paper. I will ask that question ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We have to take it on ...

Mr CONLAN: Could you please provide the committee with how you have derived this figure of \$38.346m revoted works of the previous year, which was only \$711 000, and a breakdown of where that money is to be spent or allocated.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 7.23.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. I just need a bit of help here because I am not as experienced as many of you over there. I was just wondering. You said the health budget is one - this is an overall budget for \$1.157bn? However, the appropriation is just \$1.5483bn. So, where is the difference there, and what is that money? I know, if you go to the balance sheet, there are asset sales and this sort of thing. Are you able to just highlight what that difference is?

Mr VATSKALIS: David will be able to provide it.

Mr CONLAN: So it is only an appropriation of \$1.5483bn?

Mr RYAN: All agencies are deficit funded in that we do not get cash appropriations for things like depreciation. So our depreciation, from memory, is at \$19m, but it is actually detailed. That is not funded. Also, there are timing differences, where we will get a bulk of funds, particularly from the Commonwealth, in one financial year, but we will spend it in another financial year. So they also are appropriated in a different period, if you like, and that will create a difference between the actual expense of the money and the actual receipt.

Mr CONLAN: So, the total expenses come in at \$1.157bn?

Mr RYAN: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: But the appropriation is only \$1.5483bn?

Mr RYAN: Total revenue for 2010-11 is \$1.113bn.

Mr CONLAN: Is that with ...

Mr RYAN: That has got all our own source revenue, where they are charging for services, as well as Commonwealth revenue and NT output appropriation.

Mr CONLAN: All right. Thank you, minister. I do have quite a few questions here, but I know we have to move on.

Mr WOOD: I have one more question. In relation to plumbing, specifically septic tanks, in areas outside of our major areas, our communities, do you ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is Output 4.1.

Mr WOOD: No, I just want to know, I know it is a (inaudible) but I just want to know, whose role is it in regulating the installation of those services, say, from houses?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will call Xavier Schobben, Environmental Health Director, to respond to that.

Mr SCHOBLEN: Outside of building control areas, it is subject to the *Public Health Act*, the *Public Health (General Sanitation, Mosquito Prevention, Rat Exclusion and Prevention) Regulations*, and we have got a self-certification system where my people that will install type 1, type A septic tanks, or type approved septic tanks. They need to notify us, but they do not need site specific approval, whereas, if it is not a standard approved septic tank type, then it needs site-specific approval.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you think that perhaps only licensed plumbers should install septic tanks in those areas?

Mr SCHOBLEN: At this stage, there is no requirement outside of water control districts for licensed plumbers to install septic tanks.

Mr WOOD: And like the SIHIP houses, do they need a licensed plumber to install septic tanks in those places, if they are going to be on septic, or not?

Mr SCHOBLEN: Because it is government funded, yes, there was a requirement that those septic tanks be approved or self-certified.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration for the Department of Health and Families. Thank you very much for your attendance today. We will have a five minute break as we change witnesses.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Right, we might get started then. Welcome everyone. I invited the minister to introduce the officials accompanying him, and if he wishes to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Resources.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. My Department of Resources is responsible for supporting and facilitating the development of resource-based industries throughout the Northern Territory. The resource sector: primary industry, fisheries and minerals and energy are expected to contribute around \$7.5bn to our economy over the next 12 months.

Our primary industry sector not only contributes nearly \$0.5bn a year to the Territory economy, it also remains the backbone of so many of our regional and remote communities. In the 2009-10 financial year the value of production is expected to be \$425.9m, and this is expected to rise to \$447.8m in 2010-11. Cow production for 2009-10 is expected to reach \$278m, and predicted to grow to \$296m

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over the next 12 months. In 2009-10 horticultural has continued to grow, with an estimated annual value in production of \$170m, and forecast to increase to \$121m in 2010-11.

Mixed farming has also continued to rise, with production for 2009-10 estimated to be \$50m, with a similar outcome for 2010-11.

In 2000 recreation fishing was estimated to inject at least \$35m into our economy annually, including \$9m from visitors. The figure provided by operators of the guided fishing industry indicate 34 000 (inaudible) days were generated last year and around three quarters of this were from visitors.

We recognise the important information and data about fisheries and, for that reason, the government is currently updating catch and effort (inaudible) data and this includes information on expenditure by recreational fishers. We are the first government to make the tough decision to require restaurants to identify whether seafood is local or imported, to give consumers a choice and this decision has been widely applauded by the commercial and recreation sectors in the wider community. Consumers now have a choice to buy local or imported barramundi and I always ask for the local product. In 2008-09 the estimated production value for commercial fishing was \$35m and with an estimated value of aquaculture production exceeding \$20m, the economic benefits in the commercial sector are obvious.

In terms of adding to the economy the mining and energy sectors are clearly the most significant. Not only in terms of its direct contribution to the economy, but also for all the spin-off benefits being listed in businesses in the Territory. The value of production is estimated to exceed \$7bn per annum. This government is committed to strategic programs to raise the profile of Territory minerals and energy potential and to promote it as a preferred location for exploration and investment. These programs are necessary to maintain the growth, momentum and expansion of this sector. The programs cover a range of best practices from attracting local interest and investment in drilling and geoscience initiatives, to continue the highly successful China and Japan investment strategies. These dedicated programs are delivering real results.

Mineral exploration expense in the Territory for the 2009 calendar year is now a new record of \$148.4m, 1% up on the previous record amount realised in 2008. While other states suffered a significant drop in expenditure over the same period, the Australian expenses were 22% down and in South Australia, 49% down. Similarly, an independent worldwide survey of mineral exploration companies (inaudible) reveals the best ever results for the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory ranked highest out of all Australian jurisdictions. It was in the top 10 in the world when it comes to investment attractiveness, perception of mineral potential and certainty of regulation environment.

Alternative energy programs are critical of the future wellbeing of the Territory. My department continues to manage the implementation of the Solar Cities program. It also administers Commonwealth funding for three major projects: the solar project at Ti Tree and Kalkarindji, and the solar and wind power program at Lake Nash.

The economic outlook remains positive and, as I stated earlier, the Territory is expected to contribute about \$7.5bn in value to our economy in the coming year. I am confident our economic outlook will remain positive and, once the international economic turbulence recedes, we will well positioned to take advantage of the existing market across our resource base sector.

I would like to introduce to the Estimates Committee, the Department of Resources officials who are here today: Mr Richard Galton, the CEO of the department; Mr Bernard Ho, Chief Financial Officer; Mr Rob Gobbey, Acting Chief Executive Officer; Mr Alister Trier, Executive Director Minerals and Energy; and Mr Ian Curnow, Executive Director Fisheries. I would be happy to respond to any questions and I will at times be calling other department officials who are appropriate to provide information you request.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Mr WOOD: Minister, why are you called the Department of Resources and not the department of

Primary Industry? Who decided to change its name to something that clearly does not, I believe, promote primary industry?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a semantic. Primary industry has resources; it has renewable resources. Fisheries are a resource, a renewable resource, and minerals are a resource, non-renewable. So resources covers the whole sector.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I plugged Department of Resources into my computer and all I got was natural resources. I could not find any place in the world that had a Department of Resources. Do you not think that by calling that, we are actually downplaying the importance of what we should be playing up; that is, the department of Primary Industries in the Northern Territory should be something that we should promote, and the naming it Department of Resources is actually playing it down?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was through the Administrative Orders that the name was given. It was not that decision by the minister.

Mr WOOD: What does the Administrative Orders mean? Where does that come from?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is the information we put when portfolios are allocated and designed.

Mr WOOD: So who designs portfolios?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Chief Minister does them.

Mr WOOD: So we need to ask him.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Department of Chief Minister always does it.

Mr WOOD: The department should ...

Mr VATSKALIS: This is the ...

Mr WOOD: Okay, we might do that, because I just feel that does not go well with what we should be doing promoting ...

Mr VATSKALIS: What is important is what the department does, not what the department's name is.

Mr WOOD: Well, that is what sells the department. Okay, that is my very global question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and those expenditure contained in Appropriation Bills 2010-11 as they relate to the Department of Resources.

**Agency Specific (Whole of Government Related Questions)
Budget and Fiscal Strategies**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I call on questions relating to Agency Specific (Whole-of-Government Related Questions), Budget and Fiscal Strategies.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Just a few questions on this, minister, and these were not answered in the questions on notice that we received just a couple of days ago.

First, how much was spent on consultants this year, and for what projects? If there were any reviews or reports, how many were undertaken, and how many have been finalised and made public? I am happy to put that on notice if you do not have it.

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Mr VATSKALIS: A total of \$1.3m was spent on consultants in 2008-09 for the 11 months to 31 May 2009. A total of \$1.086m was spent on consultants in 2009-10 for the 11 months to 31 May 2010. In 2008-09, there were 23 interstate and Northern Territory consultancies. In 2009-10, there were 18 interstate and Northern Territory consultancies.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Any reviews or reports arising from those consultancies?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are happy to table a list of all the consultancies, if necessary.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That would be appreciated, thank you. Next one. What was the cost of media monitoring and transcription services for the department so far this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: What was it specifically?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Media monitoring and transcription services.

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have any media monitoring and transcription services.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: We read the newspaper ourselves.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Sorry?

Mr VATSKALIS: We read the newspaper ourselves, we do not employ someone to do it for us.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: You do not employ someone to do it for you? Excellent. Minister, I realise the broader detail have been provided in those question on notice around departmental travel. There is just one specific question.

What was the cost of intra-state - within the Northern Territory - travel, including airfares, accommodation and incidentals for your CEO this financial year?

Mr GALTON: I can give you the travel expenses broken down by TA, accommodation, and airfares over the past 12 months.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Those three figures will be acceptable.

Mr GALTON: Travel allowance was \$7000 from 1 July to 31 May this year; accommodation was \$5000; and airfares were \$15 899.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: \$15 899.

Mr GALTON: Sorry, and other, including taxis, was \$5059, which is a total of \$33 000.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Sorry the last figure? Five thousand ...

Mr GALTON: \$5059.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: No problem, thank you. No further questions for me on the non-specific.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions, or do you want to check at this stage, questions as to which output, if you have any queries?

Mr WOOD: It has the standard 1.1 and 1.2?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So, we have not yet actually started on those outputs yet ...

Mr WOOD: No, that is why I will move along.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: ... but we are about to.

Mr TOLLNER: Madam Deputy Chair, I was going to jump in and ask a question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, member for Fong Lim.

Mr WOOD: Keep him under control.

**Output Group 1.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT
Output 1.1 – Minerals and Energy**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now move on to Output Group 1.0, Resource Industry Development, Output 1.1, Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions on Output 1.1 – Minerals and Energy?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, how much has the Commonwealth contributed to the Northern Territory for regulation of offshore oil and gas production during the year 2009-10?

Mr VATSKALIS: Which year do you want in particular?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: 2009-10.

Mr VATSKALIS: 2009-10 up to 19 January 2010, there was \$649 000 for tenement management, and for 2009-10, it was \$980 000, that is our annual budget allocation for (inaudible) Northern Territory work groups involved in the administration of petroleum activity. So you have \$649 000 for management tenement, and our allocation was \$980 000.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right. Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: And we were short-changed.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: The next question is, how much did you actually spend on offshore oil and gas regulation during the same period?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$1.040m.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: \$1.040m, thank you. If I can go back for a second to those other figures, the \$649 000, that is specifically funding from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is collected on behalf of the Commonwealth. We are not funded by the Commonwealth, we collect the fees on behalf of the Commonwealth.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right. So there is no contribution from the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory to regulate the offshore oil and gas industry on their behalf?

Mr TRIER: Alister Trier, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy. We collect the fees on behalf of the Commonwealth. They go to the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth redistribute them back to us, but the fees that we collect fees come back to us, the same fees, the same amount of money.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right, thank you. Minister, in a written question on notice about staffing within the petroleum activity group, and answered on 28 May this year, you identified 18 positions within that activity group, seven of which are professional positions. There was 1 x P4; 4 x P3s; 1 x P2 and a P1. You also answered that three of the P3s and the P1 are vacant positions. How long has each of those positions been vacant?

Mr TRIER: Those positions have been vacant over various period of time, but in round figures, from about October/November of 2009, the P3 position and 1 P2, I will just confirm that – yes, that is correct. One was a resignation and the other was maternity leave.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So all three positions have been vacant since October?

Mr TRIER: Sorry, two positions, I will just confirm that for you. Yes, two positions are vacant as I described, and one position, we used external contract services.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, can you please outline, since those positions became vacant, precisely what steps you have undertaken to fill those positions?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department is constantly attempting to recruit, not only for those positions, but for other positions. However, with the mining industry being (inaudible) we will find it very difficult and we have now taken measures and negotiated with the OCPE to see if we can provide additional allowances to attract people of suitable calibre to those positions. One of them is on maternity leave, so that person will come back. The other vacancy we actually utilise external services and, as I said, we attempt to recruit more people. Alistir Trier will respond further to that.

Mr TRIER: One of the actions we are undertaking is gaining an industry skills allowance for specialist positions which will, hopefully, open up the field of applicants that we get. We are finding it quite hard to compete with the petroleum industry under our current salary regimes, so we are looking to address it that way.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So you are not looking at changing the levels, you just are looking for an allowance and the OCPE will have to approve that?

Mr TRIER: That is correct.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Has that process begun?

Mr TRIER: Yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: In what way?

Mr TRIER: We are putting together a submission. We have to build a business case. That is, apparently, near finalisation and then that business case goes to the Commissioner for his consideration.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Just quickly, when do you think you will have that submitted by?

Mr TRIER: We are hoping to do that within the next two to three weeks.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, how many regulators or people working in the department do you have checking the work, on the ground, of oil and gas explorers? These are regulators on the ground checking the work of oil and gas explorers.

Mr TRIER: There are two areas there, onshore and offshore. Under the current offshore regime we do not conduct rig site visits, but we do conduct visits of exploration vessels when they are in the Port of Darwin from an environmental point of view. In terms of officers, we have two positions. At this stage, those positions are externally contracted. In terms of onshore, we have a gas pipeline specialist who looks predominantly at checking the gas fields out of Alice Springs.

Mr VATSKALIS: Commenting on the comment that the member for Fong Lim made to you, we do not actually regulate the (inaudible) the industry because it was his government when it was in power which changed the legislation, (inaudible) self-regulation. So actually, the change of legislation required the industry to regulate itself ...

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr VATSKALIS: A comment was made and I need to clarify it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me, the minister has the opportunity to respond to a comment. Thank you, minister.

Mr Tollner interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr VATSKALIS: Under the current Commonwealth legislation that was changed by the Howard government in 2004, they moved away from prescriptive legislation to self-regulating legislation. So there is no requirement for us to be on the drill. They require ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Is that onshore and offshore?

Mr VATSKALIS: Offshore, to regulate as such. I just wanted to clarify it.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So, the answer to the next question would be you have no one who does onsite, regular visits?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are not required by legislation to have any one on the rig to do it. The legislation requires the industry to self-regulate.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And when you say it is non-prescriptive, the capacity still exists for you to be able to do that work, but you chose not to because it is non-prescriptive.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, there is no requirement for us to do it and, in addition to that, to give you an example, some of these oil fields are 300 km offshore and in Commonwealth waters. In some cases, just outside Western Australia. You can understand the logistical difficulties if someone from there, living on the rig, came here. We act within the requirements of the current legislation as it stands. We cannot exceed our authority, but we have to operate (inaudible) for us to do, and we do that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Does the legislation say that you cannot perform that work, or just that there is no requirement for you to do it?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is no requirement for us to do it and the legislation does not say anything. We cannot act outside our legislation, or the Commonwealth legislation.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right, we will move on. Minister, with respect to staff you have working

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in the regulatory area of the Petroleum Activity Group, please detail the qualifications of each staff member.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take it on notice and provide an answer.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Katherine, could you just repeat that question, please?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Certainly, for Hansard, with respect to the staff you have working in the regulatory area of the petroleum activity group, please detail the qualifications of each staff member.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you and, for Hansard, that is question 7.23.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I was going to ask how many people you have right now in your department who have actually visited an offshore oil and gas production facility but I think you might have already answered that, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I think you are right.

Mr WOOD: Member for Katherine, can I just ask you ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Actually I am about to finish.

Mr VATSKALIS: In the last two years there were three visits arranged because they were required to visit. We actually considered that (inaudible).

Mr WOOD: Are there any non-filled positions in the Petroleum Activity Group?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Is that because of the 3% efficiency dividend?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: Will the 3% efficiency dividend affect this group?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. There was a maternity leave

Mr WOOD: That is all right. That is an efficiency.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, in relation to the Territory.

Mr WOOD: That has increased it by 3%. So, in this little group here, they will not be affected?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: Okay. Do you ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The member for Katherine had indicated that if you have questions

Mr WOOD: Just quickly, you gave us a list of consultants. One of those was to Glaeva Pty Ltd doing an independent environmental monitor to assess and audit the environmental performance in McArthur River Mine worth \$285 504. Has that audit been completed and is it available to the public?

Mr VATSKALIS: This was part of the agreement for the expansion of McArthur River Mine. This audit is undertaken every year to assess the effectiveness of their (inaudible). It is not only once and the results are provided to the company and to us and (inaudible).

Mr WOOD: We can get a copy of those if we ...?

Mr VATSKALIS: The money is paid by us and the company will refund the money.

Mr WOOD: The company called Ekistika Pty Ltd. I might ask you who they are but it says consultancy service to run an expression of interest process, sounds like a complicated way of doing things, for a new proponent for Lake Nash, Ti Tree and Kalkarindji solar installations was \$33 000. Exactly what is that? Are they doing the actual work or is it just that we are spending money just on the expression of interest?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am going to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.24

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, member for Nelson, you will need to repeat that as a question on notice.

Mr WOOD: My question is: could the minister explain what the process is in relation to Ekistika Pty Ltd in relation to a consultancy service to run an expressions of interest process for a new proponent for the Lake Nash, Ti Tree and Kalkarindji solar installations worth \$36 364.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, member for Nelson, that is question 7.24.

Mr GALTON: I am going to have a go at answering the question. My belief would be an expert in remote renewable power and energy systems, solar concentrators are not a specialty of our organisation and, I suspect, it would have been a consultant that has some knowledge in that area that sat back and assessed the expressions of interest that have come in from contractors that are prepared to have a go of building that facility.

Mr WOOD: I am getting a little confused now because when you go out to a remote community, say Yuendumu, for instance, they have a solar array and they have diesel. So, how do you fit into something I would have presumed belongs to Power and Water.

Mr GALTON: Certainly they are power and water facilities that generate the power. I do not believe power and water have the competency in solar power generation on top of the normal diesel generation but the interface and working the connectivity between different systems is an area that the power and water have to be interested in, in the interest of safety.

Mr WOOD: My concern here is that coactivity between the solar array and Power and Water's generators is where the major issue is in relation to how you can maximise the time a community is using solar power and the requirements to use smaller generators. The reason I am saying that is what I have been told is, in some communities you have three generators exactly the same size, the solar panels are operating and are bringing electricity into the system, there is not much load on but, because you have the generators all the same size, you cannot match the generator to the load. How do you work with Power and Water to ensure we have the best environmental footprint in that community where you are putting the solar panels? Who works to make these two sources of energy match up the most efficiently?

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Mr GALTON: The bottom line, member for Nelson, is the systems belong to Power and Water Corporation - the existing diesel powered system - and it is a matter of using local expertise. We do have some local businesses that are very component on ensuring that inverters are working through a computer system engaging with a stand alone diesel-powered system do form an integral unit and do not form the complexities we are after. It is a special body of science.

Mr WOOD: I suppose what I am worried about is, you set up diesel generators in some communities, and we are setting up solar panels. Are the two systems now working to their most efficient ends, especially in line with our reducing greenhouse gases and all that sort of thing. Because we have an older system that was set up before solar panels and, to add solar panels, the systems had to change. I am not sure.

Mr GALTON: I can assure you, we do not work independently, and the contractor comes along and installs a solar system without cognisance of Power and Water assets - both are working together.

Mr WOOD: I will leave it for Power and Water on their end, anyway. We can question them tomorrow. I am concerned about efficiencies.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Can we move on, please? Are we allowed to move on, please. Thank you, member for Nelson, I appreciate that. One quick question, from this ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: This is a local member question ...

Mr TOLLNER: No! No, I am a member of the committee, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You are, too, I beg your pardon, member for Fong Lim. It has been a long week!

Mr TOLLNER: It has been a long week! Minister, very quickly, can you table or produce any modelling that you have done in relation to the impact the resources super profits tax will have on the mining industry in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have any modelling, for the simple reason that the Commonwealth government is currently under negotiation with the mining industry as to what form the tax will take. the only thing we know is it is going to be a profit-based tax, very similar to the profit-based royalty system we have here in the Northern Territory. Currently, we have a negotiation with the mining industry ...

Mr TOLLNER: Minister, that is fine. You have no modelling.

Members interjecting

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Member for Arafura.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: A point of order! Standing Order 51 ...

Mr Tollner: We have time constraints here, you know that!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The member for Fong Lim has asked a question; he should at least allow the minister to finish answering the question ...

Mr TOLLNER: He did answer; he said no, we have none!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I know he does not like the response ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Order! Member for Fong Lim, you did ask a question and the minister was endeavouring to answer that question and you cut him off ...

Mr TOLLNER: Well, he did answer it, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will ask him that ...

Mr TOLLNER: Well, he did answer, and he said no they do not have it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Excuse me, member for Fong Lim! Minister, continue.

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, my answer was there is no way you can do a model if you do not know the factors involved in the super tax. If we do not factor the different values the Commonwealth allocate. We do not know if the Commonwealth will tax minerals at a different rate. We do not know what will be the lift off – whether it will be 6% or 12%. How can you actually do modelling without hearing this vital and important information?

Mr TOLLNER: Okay. I have another question of a similar vein, something that you will have information on because there was a bill in the federal parliament outlining all of the detail. Can you table the modelling that your department did in relation to the carbon pollution reduction scheme that was proposed by the Rudd government?

Mr VATSKALIS: I would love to but, unfortunately, it was not my department that did that model; it was the Chief Minister's Department.

Mr TOLLNER: Okay, no worries. One more quick question. Can you outline your future plans for the extractive industries in the Top End?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our future – actually we are going to have an expansion of the extractive industry more than any other industry, to be ...

Mr TOLLNER: Absolutely, can you table those plans that you have? Bearing in mind, I will background you, minister ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr TOLLNER: ... the 13 Mile Quarry, obviously, as you are aware, has been closed now for two years, you are running out of reserves. Where are you going to get sand, gravel and the like for future development of Darwin and Palmerston and all these other great infrastructure programs that your government crows on endlessly about?

Mr VATSKALIS: Last time I checked, member for Fong Lim, we live in a free economy. These kinds of decisions are made by the private businesses, not by the government. This is a natural progression of Darwin growing. When I first came to the Territory, Palmerston was 7000 people ...

Mr TOLLNER: So it is private industry that is building Darwin, not government.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fong Lim, cease interjecting, thank you. Standing Order 51.

Mr TOLLNER: No, he has answered the question, Madam Deputy Chair, we can move on.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Well let him finish. Member for Fong Lim, can I just remind you of Standing Order 51, please, and that is about not interrupting people when they are speaking. Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: In addition to that, member for Fong Lim, if you actually bothered to actually have a look at what we are doing now, there is a tenement system in place where the department allocates land for different activities, and people are entitled, and they can apply for different tenements for different purposes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, so that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Primary Industry

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output 1.2, Primary Industry. Are there any questions?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, can you please detail a complete breakdown of the budget estimates for each division of the Department of Primary Industry, for example, Plant Industry; Animal Industry; Biosecurity; Research and Development; Corporate Services; Administration, etcetera? And also, and if it is easier to table something, I am happy to accept that, also minister, the same divisional budget details for 2010-11?

Mr GOBBEY: Rob Gobbey, Executive Director, Primary Industry. I do not have at hand the budget details for the previous financial year, but for the coming financial year, I can give the breakdown for the various groups within the Primary Industry.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, and I will put the other one on notice.

Mr GOBBEY: Thank you. The total budget for the Primary Industry group of the Department of Resources is \$38 473 090, the breakdown being, within my direct budget control, which includes the regional officers of the department and their operating expenses, that is \$3 122 890. There is the Policy and Services group, which has a budget of \$3 365 200. The Plant Industry division, which includes the plant diagnostic capacity, as well as the Research and Development and the extension capacity, that has a budget of \$7 254 300. The Biosecurity and Product Integrity Division, which includes the Berrimah Veterinary Laboratory, has a budget allocation of \$6 116 200; and the Pastoral Production Division, which includes the research farms associated with that division, has a budget allocation of \$5 921 500. Those figures in total come to \$25 780 090.

The balance that brings the total figure to \$38 473 090 includes a number of separate items to do with building depreciation; the Primary Industry group share of the corporate costs; the cost to whole-of-government payroll services; and the repairs and maintenance of all buildings and infrastructure. There would be a comparable breakdown to the previous year for the question on notice. Given that the structural arrangements of the Primary Industry group have changed year on year, there will not be precise alignment between the divisions because of the structural realignment.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Partly the reason why there is structural realignment by this government we see regularly. Thank you, Mr Gobbey.

Question on Notice No 7.25

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Partly the reason why there is structural realignment by this government we see regularly. Thank you, Mr Gobbey.

My Question on Notice for Hansard is: can the minister please provide the complete breakdown of budget estimates for each division within the department of Primary Industries, for example plant industry, animal industry, biosecurity, research and development, corporate services, administration etcetera, for the 2009-10 financial year?

Mr GOBBEY: That information will be prepared. I suggest it be standardised in the format so last

year's figures can be compared to the current figures, so there is a comparative alignment.

Madam CHAIR: For the benefit of Hansard, that is question No 7.25.

Mr VATSKALIS: And for the benefit of members information, the structure of the testimony was not assumed by the government, it was actually as a result of the independent review of the department that took place last year. So, it is not a government decision; it was to review the department in which the industry was involved, and changes were made to reflect that of the industry and to provide better service to the industry. So, let us make it clear that it was the work of Turnbull the review the work that was undertaken, an independent review.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTE: Okay, if you say so, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I do say so. This is the review and I am very happy to table it.

Mr WESTRA VAN HOLTE: I have the review. Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Oh good, so you knew about it?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTE: Oh, yes. Minister, in the current financial year, other than forays to Indonesia, please detail which countries you or your department has visited where the purpose of that visit was to establish or re-establish live cattle trade.

Mr VATSKALIS: The department visited Indonesia; the department also had several visits to Vietnam.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is it? Thank you. Minister, according to the May 2010 pastoral market update, there have been no Northern Territory cattle sent to Sabah or West Malaysia in the past 12 months, Sarawak since 2008, or East Timor since at least 2007. Minister, please detail the last occasions that either you or your department visited Sabah, Sarawak, West Malaysia or East Timor for the purposes of re-establishing live trade to those countries.

Mr GOBBEY: There has been travel to Malaysia within the last year. That information would be at hand and I can provide that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: That is different to the answer before.

Mr VATSKALIS: I visited Vietnam and you asked about the department?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, you or your department.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, I visited Vietnam and Indonesia only, but two weeks ago there was the Agriculture minister of Malaysia was here in town. I met with him and he intends to invite me to Malaysia to start some (inaudible) programs we have had with each other, which he was not fully aware of. So I am looking forward to visiting Malaysia in the very near future and re-establishing the cattle export.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, in 2009-10, how many personnel from the department were directly engaged in work around quarantine and biosecurity? And the same figures for 2010-11 if you have them.

Mr GOBBEY: The employment number for the department, for the primary industries group at present is 203, and the breakdown ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am happy to put it on notice if you have not got it readily available.

Mr GOBBEY: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.26

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Katherine, could you repeat that for the Hansard.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, minister, in financial year 2009-10 and also financial year 2010-11, how many personnel from the department were or will be directly engaged in work around quarantine and biosecurity?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I am conscious of the time because I really want to get onto Fisheries as well, so I am just going to really ask one more question out of many that I have.

If I look at pages 219 and 155 of Budget Paper No 3 for 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively so that is 219 in 2009-10 and page 155 in 2010-11. There is a budget blowout of over \$2m from the 2009-10 budgeted allocation to the final estimated expenditure for the current financial year. If you look at the figures there one says \$37 598 and the other says \$39 709. Minister, can you please detail just what the additional \$2m was spent on the primary industries output group during 2009-10?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.27

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You will need to repeat the question.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, if I look at pages 219 and 155 of Budget Paper No 3 for 2009-10 and 2010-11 respectively, there is a budget blowout of over \$2m from the 2009-10 budgeted allocation to the final estimated expenditure for the current financial year. Can you please detail just what the additional \$2m was spent on in the primary industries output group during 2009-10?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question 7.27.

Mr GALTON: Member for Katherine, can I attempt to answer that.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes.

Mr GALTON: The advice I have it has been mostly variations to externally funded projects. I do not know how far that takes you.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Probably not far enough, Mr Galton, but thank you. I will leave it on notice. I am cognisant of wanting to get to Fisheries so I am going to stop the questions there.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I have plenty of questions. I will do two. One is on bees. Can you give us an update on bee imports from Western Australia? How many bees have been imported? You do not have to count the number of bees. It might come in quantities, boxes or something. Have any diseases or pests

been recorded since bee imports were permitted from Western Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: Based on the advice from the experts including the Industry Government Working Party importation of packets bees were permitted from Western Australia, south west of Western Australia after they tested negative for two bee diseases, the American foulbrood and the European foulbrood and found to be free of small hive beetle.

Two consignments of packets bees in 2009 from a melon grower near Darwin, the melon grower does not intend to import any packets of bees during 2010, however, others have expressed interest. Surveillance of the apiaries of the eight commercial bee keepers in the Darwin, Katherine and Mataranka areas for the 12 months since 2009 is almost complete. Monthly inspections for small hive beetle have been conducted with none of these pests in them.

Mr WOOD: I understand that the peanut farm in Katherine is up for sale. It has been up for sale for a while. Does this mean that the production in the Katherine region, if the farm is sold, will finish?

Mr GALTON: My advice is no but, yes, the property is up for sale. As you are probably aware, they have rotation crop set through it - maize as well as peanuts. The bids were passed in, and we believe that companies are still in negotiations with some of the unsuccessful tenderers.

Mr WOOD: I have plenty of other questions.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: They could be written questions on notice later.

Mr WOOD: I will.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes then, consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Fisheries

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now proceed to Output 1.3, Fisheries.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, how many barramundi licences do you intend to buy back during the 2010-11 year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Government intends to buy another three barramundi licences. We have asked the industry to talk to us; we are very keen to buy another three barramundi licences. Can I clarify?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: What sections of coastline ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Can I clarify? Did you say buying barramundi licences this year or this term?

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: This year, 2010-11.

Mr VATSKALIS: We have called on the industry to sell up to three barramundi licences. That is our intention to buy them within this term. If it happens this year, we happened to buy them this year. If it happens during the term, we will buy them during the term.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. I go back one. When you do purchase a barramundi licence, from which line of the operating statement does the money for these licences come?

Mr CURNOW: Ian Curnow, Executive Director of Fisheries. The previous commitment of licences that were bought were bought back by Treasurer's Advance. However, there is a budget line this year for \$600 000 over the next three years to put some funds into that buy-back scheme. That commenced in 2009-10 and continues 2010-11 and 2011-12 at \$600 000 per year. Then, depending on those

negotiations and the price of the licences bought, we will continue to liaise with Treasury about the actual amounts of money needed.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: So, up until now, the money has come from Treasurer's Advance?

Mr CURNOW: For the previous buy-back; the previous four licences that were bought back over the last two financial years, yes.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.3

Mr VATSKALIS: I have the answer to the question that the member asked about the budget blowout. I think it was question on notice No 7.3

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: On 10 July, almost a year ago, you announced a barramundi fishery advisory group would be formed, and that the committee would report back within 12 months on permanent closures, including the rest of Fog Bay. When is that management advisory committee going to be actually formed?

Mr CURNOW: A chairman has been appointed for that committee, and that membership is being finalised at the moment. I would probably defer to the minister on an actual start-up date, but we expect that will be fairly shortly.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: It is 12 months down the track, and we have only appointed a chairman.

Mr VATSKALIS: The difficulty was to actually find someone to be the chairman, because of various constraints. We have a chairman, we can proceed very quickly. An independent chairman, I should say, not someone who will (inaudible) with industry.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: You are on record regularly about the contribution that the amateur fishing sector makes to the NT economy. In fact, in a media release in 2008, you said the recreational fishing contributes more than \$30m to our economy. How much does the commercial fishing sector contribute to the Northern Territory economy? You take it in the same parameters, I suppose, or similar parameters as the estimates you make on amateur fishing?

Mr CURNOW: In terms of knowing figures around the commercial fishery, currently, the gross value of production of the commercial fisheries for the NT is \$35m in 2009-10.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And that come out of your annual report?

Mr CURNOW: That is straight off cash value of product. Aquaculture, another \$20m on top of that, so that is taking it to \$55m. We do not have a analysis of all those additional costs in terms of boat builders, boat repairers, transport costs for the fish product to Sydney etcetera. We do not have an evaluation around those other things.

The GVP is \$55m, then plus the northern prawn fishery that is Commonwealth managed. Then, obviously, there are multipliers: sale of those fish, transport of those fish, repairs to vessels, bait, etcetera. But we do not have figures on those.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay. I am just a bit miffed and surprised, I suppose, that so often we hear, minister, you talk about the contribution of the amateur sector to the Northern Territory economy, yet here today at Estimates, you cannot tell me what the commercial sector contributes to the Northern Territory ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I actually told you in the opening statement about how much the industry contributes and, on top of that, not only we recognise the contribution of industry, we are the first government ever in Australia to support strongly our industry by demanding, by law, that anyone who sells fish for human consumption, especially restaurants ...

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Yes, I have that, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... states whether it is local or imported. Even the industry recognises that that is a significant boost to the industry.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right. I will move on from there. How much was spent by your department in 2009-10 on the Blue Mud Bay permit negotiations, and from where was that money obtained?

Mr VATSKALIS: This actually comes under the Chief Minister's Department, but we will conduct the negotiations. The money comes from my department, and just under \$0.5m was spent on negotiations over the last year.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And where did that money come from?

Mr VATSKALIS: That comes from my budget.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: From your budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Okay. Interesting, thank you for the answer, but I am just going to refer you back to the transcript of the Department of the Chief Minister's Estimates on Tuesday this week, where Mr Shields says, 'the actual cost of negotiations are being borne by the Department of Resources through a Treasurer's Advance'.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, that is right.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: All right. You neglected to mention Treasurer's Advance.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we did.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: It comes out of us, and we take a Treasurer's Advance.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you, minister. Moving right along, because I am watching the time. Have you got questions, member for Nelson, on Fisheries?

Mr WOOD: Keep going. If you run out, then I will take it.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, how many licences are there in the coastal line fishery?

Mr CURNOW: Approximately 60, but I will just get an exact number – 54.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Fifty-four, thank you, Mr Curnow. Minister, on average, how many of those licences are actively fished at any given time?

Mr CURNOW: Approximately, in a given year, about 20 of those licences are used to varying degrees, obviously, some to a small degree, some to a lot. My recollection is, about a dozen of those licences are fished reasonably solidly.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: About 12?

Mr CURNOW: And then that difference between the 12 and the 18, that might change between the years as to which operator actually operates.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: Thank you, Mr Curnow. Minister, the Coastal Line Fishery Management Advisory Committee met in around October last year. Have you or your department received a report or been briefed regarding the immediate management of that fishery as a result of the meeting? So, has anything been brought to your attention about the immediate management of that fishery as a result of that meeting?

Mr CURNOW: The Management Advisory Committee, as part of its processes, has done an ecological risk assessment of that fishery, that is what we call a data poor fishery, but they have looked at the risk to various species, and they went through a day workshop, so they have compiled a report that identifies a number of species of being at high risk and in the need of further management. The MAC is now working through that process of looking at what management arrangements are needed for both the commercial, recreational and fishing tour operator sector to try and regulate those catches.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER: All right. I suppose I should just go back to the question I asked, was whether as a result of the October meeting of that MAC last year, was the department briefed on the outcome of that, were you advised that there were immediate management issues around that fishery?

Mr CURNOW: The department was involved in that process, so, yes, it is aware of the risk assessment that has been placed around that. I am not sure of the immediacy of the management arrangements as in, it was a risk assessment, so it worked out a number of species of high risk, a number of medium risk. I guess. in fisheries terms, it was not that management is needed tomorrow, but it was clearly signalling that management changes are required if those stocks are to be sustainable in the long term.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHER cont: Thank you, Mr Curnow, which is an interesting comment you make given the contents of that report which says on page 5, and I quote from that report:

Black jewfish and golden snapper received the highest risk values in both high and low fishing effort areas and require immediate management action to ensure sustainability. It further goes on to say, cods, coral trout, red emperor, grass emperor sharks and mangrove jack, also require prompt management action in stocks are to be maintained.

Minister, you had the MAC reported to you eight or nine months ago, you have now had this report done for you as well. What action are you taking to ensure the sustainability of this issue, given that this is and does and you have had it from several sources now, a requirement for immediate action, immediate management.

Mr CURNOW: In terms of the risk to jewfish stocks will largely, the increases in recent years have been through recreational catches or presumed catches. We have just done a survey over the last 12 months that will actually confirm those numbers. The commercial catches have, in fact, decreased since they peaked in the early 2000, so they have actually been plateaued for a number of years, so in terms of those risks the recreational possession limit for the jewfish was changed from five to two on the 1 January this year; and the Management Advisory Committee is also, at the moment, working separately with the fishing operator sector with AFANT and with the commercial sector to develop more specific management arrangements for each of those sectors.

Mr VATSKALIS: This is the same situation we have seen in other states because of the advance of technology people can now pinpoint exactly where the fish aggregate because of GPS, and they can harm them. It happened in Western Australia in the Monkey Mia area, the snapper was completely hunted to such an extent that the Western Australian government stepped in and prohibited fishing to everyone of that particular species. We have done that here in the Territory and I will consider tougher measures if we find people continue to harm the species and put in restrictions. But, again, as Ian said, we had that before (inaudible) by the commercial fishers, but since 2002 the commercial catch has declined while the amateur fish catching was going through the roof. We have tried to stop this.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: And certainly there is a holistic strategy to deal with this. I ask the question because it has been nine months since you advised about the immediate action required, and I was wondering where you were at with the management ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... reducing the catch limit on the amateur which seems to pose a bigger threat for the species rather than the commercial catch.

Mr CURNOW: Just to clarify those risk ratings where they were deemed to be higher risk was specifically around the Darwin area. I think it was acknowledged in the report that the risk to even jewfish and golden snapper in other areas of the Territory, given its vast coastline and relative remoteness to access many of those areas, those risks were not same, so it is an immediate management issue around the Darwin zone and that is why we are working with both the fishing tour operators sector and AFANT and separately the commercial sector to focus on that 100 kilometre zone around Darwin and how we might manage those stocks.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Thank you. I will move on to a new subject. Minister, how many people within the Fisheries Department possess qualifications that are specific to fisheries management, and I do not mean personnel with generic science degrees or any other generic qualifications?

Mr CURNOW: In terms of the specifics we will have to take that on notice, but I am fairly certain almost all of my research staff of 11 or 12 are all fisheries biologists rather than general ecologists, and a number of our managers have also been to the AMC (Australian Maritime College) in Tasmania have fisheries management specific qualifications, but I need to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.28

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: I will repeat the question for *Hansard*.

Minister, how many people within Fisheries possess qualifications that are specific to fisheries management, and I do not mean personnel with general science degrees or other generic qualifications.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 7.28.

Mr WESTRA van HOLTHE: Minister, please detail what training programs or professional development courses have been undertaken by Fisheries personnel in the past 12 months, and the cost of those training programs and courses.

Mr VATSKALIS: I think we will have to take that on notice.

Mr CURNOW: It was specifically fisheries personnel.

Question on Notice No 7.29

Mr WESTRA Van HOLTHE: Fisheries personnel, yes. And I will repeat the question for *Hansard*.

Minister, please detail what training programmes or professional development courses have been undertaken by fisheries personnel in the past 12 months and the cost of those training programmes or courses.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 7.29.

Answer to Question No 7.26

Mr VATSKALIS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have a response to question No 7.26.

Mr WOOD: Can I just grab one before that final?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Just one question.

Mr WOOD: Just one question. Minister, you have spent \$26 547 on a report on a feasibility study for a ranger college on the Tiwi Islands. What was the result of that feasibility study and what is the ranger college?

Mr CURNOW: Yes, that consultancy arose as part of the Blue Mud Bay discussions with the Tiwi and I guess looking at training marine rangers and how that could be best done in the future. That particular consultancy was looking at the barra base on the Tiwi Islands and how it might be set up as a specific marine ranger training college, so the consultancy actually looked at what the demands were in terms of how often it would be used for that purpose. I think, in terms of a summary of that, it pointed out if it was only to be used for that purpose alone, there would be many weeks of unused time and space and that would not be necessarily the best way to go.

We are, however, doing some further consultancy which just started up recently that is actually looking at, I guess, the best way to deliver training to marine rangers and Indigenous people that might be interested in getting into the fishing industry in general. It is an FRDC sponsored project and that is looking at the concept of should it actually be a fixed single location where people come, or more of a remote training opportunity where the trainers actually go out on country and actually train the people there.

On a similar basis, I guess, we have been running for the last two years, Certificate II in compliance for the marine rangers. One has been delivered in Jabiru this year where we invited three or four rangers from each group to actually come along. The year before it was in Katherine. I guess, this is taking it beyond just that marine ranger training program and looking at a whole range of other skills in terms of participation in management, participation in the seafood industry or commercial fishing industry and how that could best be delivered.

Mr VATSKALIS: And member for Nelson, the value of the rangers were recognised when in the past few years we have had the incursion of illegal fishermen. They have done an excellent job, so the department has worked with Charles Darwin University and Police Marine Fisheries Enforcement Section to deliver Certificate II training to a group of women rangers during 2010-11. In addition to that, we are working with the Australian Fisheries Academy and CDU to develop a Certificate III and Certificate IV Fisheries Compliance program for marine rangers. We really want the marine rangers to become not just people having a fake job, we want people with real jobs and enforce our fisheries legislation.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. Time is against us. We do need to wind up this session. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the minister for attending today and also the officers who have attended with him to provide advice. Thank you very much. We will just take a three minute break while we change over.

The committee suspended.

**MINISTER HAMPTON'S PORTFOLIOS
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT, THE ARTS AND SPORT**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We have a quorum here for the committee. Welcome everybody. I invite the minister to introduce the accompanying officials and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you Madam Deputy Chair and members. I am joined at the table this afternoon by Mr Jim Grant the Chief Executive of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts and Ms Susan Kirkman, Executive Director of Business Services.

This is my first budget as the minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage portfolios and the Parks and Wildlife portfolio, and my second budget for the Sport and Recreation portfolio. These portfolios sit within the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport, a department that is one of the key drivers behind this government's *Territory 2030* plan for its Greening the Territory and great Territory lifestyle initiatives.

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sports is a key lifestyle agency charged with protecting the community interests in, and securing public value from, our natural and cultural assets. This involves there being an engagement creating understanding, facilitating participation and decision-making, and informing and involving the community in our natural environment. It also involves stewardship and care of the Territory's cultural assets.

As we move through the outputs that I am responsible for, I will be joined by other departmental officers being Graham Phelps, Executive Director of Parks and Wildlife; Diana Leeder, Executive Director of Natural Resources; John Woinarski, Director Biodiversity Conservation; Matt Darcey, Executive Director of Environment and Heritage; and Steve Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport, Venues and Indigenous Development.

I would like to make some brief introductory comments relating to the department's budget, specifically as it relates to my areas of responsibility. I welcome the member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Oh, thank you, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Budget 2010-11 delivers more than \$101m to protect and manage our unique Territory environment. Notable initiatives include the government's continued commitment to jointly managing parks with Indigenous Territorians and the groundbreaking Territory EcoLink initiative that is connecting our reserves with conservation links on private lands, an initiative that has now been expanded to South Australia to create the world's first transcontinental conservation corridor.

Also, ongoing funding for the Territory Crocwise program; a big boost in funding for camel control; development of the cash for containers scheme; delivery of an environmental assessment, compliance and enforcement arrangements; funding to protect, conserve and interpret our heritage.

Budget 2010-11 continues the support that this government provides to grassroots sport and recreation, as well as major national and international sporting fixtures in the Territory, such as the ARL, NRL, NBL, WNBL and Super 15 Rugby Union.

A major initiative will be the development of the four Palmerston sporting facilities, at the cost of \$33m, plus the \$13.5m commitment for the Palmerston water park, bringing fantastic sporting and recreation facilities to Palmerston.

Madam Deputy Chair, the Environment Protection Agency also comes within the Natural Resources,

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Environment and Heritage portfolio, and for the purposes of the *Financial Management Act*, has its budget administered under the Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage portfolio. I am happy to take questions on the EPA during this session as appropriate.

Jacinta Stanford, Acting Executive Director, Environment Protection Authority, will also be assisting in this regard.

Madam Deputy Chair, I am happy to take further questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions directly relating to the statement?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, I have three. But first of all, minister, thank you and the department for providing the generic questions this morning. It answers a lot of questions that actually made me go from bold to not so bold, so there were some great answers there and I appreciate that.

I will ask a couple of questions though. In regard to consultancies, can you please advise if, within the last 12 months, the company Sanmore and Graham Morris provided any consultancy services for NRETAS? And further, did Adele Young provide any consultancy services for NRETAS in the last 12 months?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to provide that answer through my Chief Executive, Mr Jim Grant, but I am not sure if that is related to another output area, but happy to take that on board now, if you like.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, I think there is one Sanmore consultancy for Territory Wildlife Park, for \$12 770. I do not believe there is anything else.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent, thank you.

Minister, again this year, we see a dramatic reduction in employee staff expenses, and this is an NRETAS-wide question. We have seen \$3.3m last year, \$3.337m this year; that is \$6.6m over two years. Can you explain where NRETAS has lost, or will be losing, up to 90-odd staff members during this and the last budget period, or is there another answer for the loss of \$6.6m over two years?

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of the overall budget for NRETAS, I am happy again to hand over to Mr Jim Grant, who can provide little bit of detail. Or to Susan Kirkman.

Ms KIRKMAN: Susan Kirkman, Executive Director, Business Services. I can provide details of the movement in the budget from 2009-10 to 2010-11, but I do not have the information from the previous year. Would you like me to go there, or just take that on record?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, that is fine.

Question on Notice No 8.1

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Brennan, I just need you to repeat that question, please.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, just succinctly, there has been \$6.6m over two years taken from the employee budget. Is there another explanation, or does this equate to about 90-odd staff lost from NRETAS?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you happy to take that question on notice?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For Hansard, that is question No 8.1

Mr CHANDLER: The last question I have in regard to the general opening. Minister, were you aware that according to this years budget figures the average cost per employee in the Chief Minister's department is over \$110 000 per employee, while the average cost per employee in NRETAS is just over \$77 000. Minister, that is an average cost to provide scientists, professionals and crocodile management experts; however, this same government, your government, is prepared to pay over \$110 00 for employees to promote spin. What does this say about the priorities of this government?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I was not aware of that but can I say this government's track record in terms of the environment, as in my opening remarks I listed a range of initiatives this government is introducing. We are a government of reform, we are a government of initiatives and our track record speaks for itself.

In terms of those specialist positions in my agency, I certainly respect the work they do; they are a fantastic group of people who provide very sound advice, unlike the opposition, who we know have their secret plan to strip public service jobs ...

Members interjecting.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of my government, I am very proud of our track record and the amount of reform that is going on in the environment area, and the professionalism of my staff.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. The last question I have: looking at the NRETAS total infrastructure program of \$56 175 000, if you take out \$10.9m for repairs and maintenance, it brings you back to \$45.2m; take out \$6 463 000 from the Commonwealth for the drag strip upgrade and Araluen Arts Centre solar air-conditioning system, and the \$35m revoted works, this year's budget - this is new NT money for infrastructure - is only \$3 448 000. Again, what does this say about the priorities of this government, in particular, your department?

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of my department, there are enormous priorities that this government has delivered on and will continue to deliver on and, again, I am happy to hand over to Susan Kirkman to point that out; but across our parks the initiatives I outlined in my opening remarks demonstrates and show everyone that we are delivering on the environment.

Mr CHANDLER: If I can clarify, the reality is we start off with a budget that promotes \$56m and then when you start to take away and drill down to the different levels, we are left with about \$3.5m of new works. Is it because of mostly revoted works from last year that did not get done?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to pass on to Susan Kirkman. I think you do not really understand the budget papers.

Mr CHANDLER: Obviously not.

Mr HAMPTON: I will just ask her to clarify that for you.

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, if we could check the figures and take that on notice?

Mr CHANDLER: Absolutely.

Question on Notice No 8.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please repeat the question.

Mr CHANDLER: From the original budget of \$56.175m, once you factor in repairs and maintenance, Commonwealth money and revoked works, we are left with \$3 448 000. Can the minister detail how or why so much money was not spent last year.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For *Hansard*, that is question No 8.2.

Mr WOOD: Is this the time for clarification of inputs?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It will be.

Mr WOOD: Before I miss out there, just clarification of where the Howard Springs Nature Park remediation works fits. Do they fit under 1.1 or 1.3?

Mr HAMPTON: 1.2 Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs, as I understand.

Mr WOOD: All right. In regards to the local management group, I want to ask questions about them, do they fit into this section, or are joint management program purely Indigenous management programs?

Mr HAMPTON: 1.2 again, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: And the park management plan for Howard Springs, where is that?

Mr HAMPTON: 1.2.

Mr WOOD: Not much left. Okay. I have some left.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, are you ready to move straight on to ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - PARKS AND RESERVES
Output 1.1 - Parks Joint Management Programs

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We move on to Output Group 1.0 Parks and Reserve. Output 1.1 Parks Joint Management Programs. Questions.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what is the current annual expenditure on jointly managed parks?

Mr HAMPTON: Parks and Wildlife manages around 89 parks, that is Parks and Reserves. Twenty-seven of those parks are subject to joint management arrangements under the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*. As minister this is the approach that I fully endorse as this government does, unlike previous dealings with our parks and traditional owners and land councils. I have been fortunate enough in my short time in this portfolio to attend a number of park handovers and I fully endorse that approach. I have attended the Jessie and Emily Gap park handover as well as Jutpurra or the Gregory National Park handover. But in relation to that budget item I am happy to hand over to Graham Phelps from Parks and Wildlife.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, I have the costings on all of the parks here but I do not have them in a form that gives the breakdown on joint managed parks alone. So if we could take that question on notice and it is very easy to supply to you.

Question on Notice No 8.3

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Chandler. I just need you to repeat that question please.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes. What is the current annual expenditure on jointly managed parks?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 8.3.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please provide an update on the Limmen National Park.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, happy to do that, and I will pass over to Graham Phelps who would have more details on the current status of that.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, Limmen National Park, the proposed national park, is owned by the Northern Territory Land Corporation and we manage it under an agreement with them. We are currently seeking legal advice on how to get the park declared and under what ownership and what status, whether it stays with the Northern Territory Land Corporation or needs to transfer to the Conservation Land Corporation for that declaration process to go ahead.

Most of the land claim issues on the former pastoral properties that make up the proposed Limmen National Park are now resolved. There are still some native title issues which will need to be resolved but we are working our way through that process. As far as day to day management goes, it is managed by a team based at Nathan River, the main ranger station in the park and also by the team that is based at Borrooloola to do the bottom end of the park. It is managed for its biodiversity and its visitor values. The visitation for that park is around about 8000 visitors a year predominantly for the fishing in some of the remote sites in that area.

Mr CHANDLER: Would it be easier for you to ask a question on the time frame for setting up a new park? I mean I completely appreciate that there could be land title issues, there could be many issues. But, for a lay person, how long would it normally take if you, the Minister, or the government, decided that they wanted to commence a new national park, what is say an average time frame to have that process complete?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, I have not actually gone through the experience myself, so I cannot talk from experience on this and it does vary considerably depending on the complexities of the matter. Limmen has an additional complexity in that it is actually owned by NT Land Corporation rather the Conservation Land Corporation and that is why we are seeking legal advice and it becomes a little bit like how long is a piece of string? We are hoping that, depending on the advice that comes through, we would be hoping that, depending on the advice that comes through, that end of this calendar year, ideally, but certainly the end of this financial year, we would like to see that park declared under section 12 of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*.

Mr CHANDLER: Given the federal minister, Peter Garrett, came out on radio and openly stated the EcoLinks program was a fantastic initiative, and the process to date in South Australia has been very successful. However, there were some serious issues in the NT. Can you please advise why South Australia has been able to manage this program successfully, but we have what has been described as issues here in the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: I am not too sure what those issues are you are relating to, member for Brennan. Maybe you could give me a bit more detail on that.

Mr CHANDLER: I am only going on what the federal minister said.

Mr HAMPTON: I can say, in EcoLink, it is a fantastic initiative by this government. It is all about

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protecting the biodiversity of the Northern Territory through science, through a lot of work that this department has done, determining where the corridor is through the Northern Territory ...

Mr CHANDLER: And I totally agree. I am on your side here.

Mr HAMPTON: I am not sure. I need a bit more clarification on what those particular issues you were saying EcoLink has in the Northern Territory.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, just in the Northern Territory. It was ...

Mr WOOD: Can I just check ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Madam Deputy Chair, can we just check whether Output 1.1 is about parks deployment management program? The question the shadow member has raised, I thought, would be in either Output 4.0 Environment and Sustainability, rather than in Parks management.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, we will take guidance from you as to whether we are in the correct output for this question.

Mr CHANDLER: I am happy to hold off.

Mr HAMPTON: It is under 1.3, Madam Deputy Chair, I can advise, yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Well, we are in 1.1 at the moment.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that is under Output 1.3.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr CHANDLER: I am happy to hold off on that. That is all from me.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, I suppose the joint management plans, they are a good thing. One of the reasons I support it was because I was under the understanding that Gregory National Park would be expanded in size. Has that joint management plan included the land between the east and west sections of the Gregory National Park and, if so, has there been a corresponding increase in the budgets to manage that area?

Mr HAMPTON: The park is the largest park that has been jointly managed back, and it takes in three different land trusts, taking in the southern end of Gregory National Park ...

Mr WOOD: But has the middle bit been included, which was part of, I thought, the original agreement?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, that is right, it has. As I said, it has been included, in the overall cost to manage that.

Mr WOOD: I need short answers, because they have me on a timer.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay. Well, you talk a lot.

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is right, yes.

Mr HAMPTON: Very good question.

Mr WOOD: He waffles at other blokes, but not for me.

Mr HAMPTON: It is not waffle. In terms of the budget, did you want ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, is there an increase in the budget to match the change in the park?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, the joint management arrangements, when they came in, it was \$3m. Additional funds came to meet some of the additional costs of joint management across the Northern Territory, and some of that \$3m has been applied to Gregory National Park, in particular, in aspects like apprenticeships, actually putting more staff on the ground, and more work on the ground through that funding.

Mr WOOD: There are lots of questions I could ask on Gregory National Park.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Great place. In relation to Keep River National Park, that was the one park that was left out of joint management plans. What is the status of that park at the present time?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will hand over to Graham Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Keep River National Park is declared under section 12 of the act, and is operating as a normal non-joint managed national park. However, like a lot of our national parks that are not formally under the joint management arrangements, Aboriginal people with traditional affiliations to those are key and special stakeholders in those parts. So, we work very closely with the traditional owners of Keep River in our planning work for our management plans in the area. There is at least one community living area within that park as well, and the close relationships between our staff and the Aboriginal people of Keep River National Park.

Mr WOOD: And last question, in relation to Chambers Pillar Conservation Reserve, in your last annual report, you said the reason that the management plan had been delayed is because there were disputed claims amongst traditional owners. Has that been sorted out, and has the management plan been finalised?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I will hand over to Graham Phelps, but before I do, as Graham has pointed out, there \$3m in the joint management budget was allocated in 2009-10. I can say that 59% of that is Indigenous employment training programs, 9% joint management planning, and 32% for governance and other projects. In terms of Chambers Pillar, I understand that is transferred to Aboriginal ownership under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, Schedule 1. Graham might want to add to that.

Mr PHELPS: I would not say that the issues around ownership are completely resolved, member for Nelson, but the joint management plan is completed, and we would be hoping to have that tabled fairly soon, later this year.

Mr WOOD: If you have got disputes about who is the traditional owner, then how can you have a management plan?

Mr HAMPTON: Good point. Well, that management plan has been done in consultation with all the traditional owners, and through the Central Land Council, so in terms of the other issues, I suppose that is an issue for the land council to work through with those particular groups, but it does not stop the management plan.

Mr WOOD: But surely you could not sign up on a management plan which is designed to work with the government and the traditional owners if you are not sure who the traditional owners are of that particular reserve?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, that is not a point for us, that is a point for the land councils. Under the *Land Rights Act*, it is their statutory function to sort that out.

Mr WOOD: But you would not sign off on a plan until that was sorted out?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you.

Mr TOLLNER: I have only got a couple of questions. Under these joint management plans, have you arrived at agreement on how revenue will be generated in these parks?

Mr PHELPS: There are a number of ways that revenue is generated in the parks. There will be rental payments for those parks where tenure is held by the traditional owners of the parks, and those values are worked out by the Valuer-General.

Mr TOLLNER: What about the parks that were handed over to traditional owners?

Mr PHELPS: They are the parks where the traditional owners have tenure, have ownership of those parks. There will be rental payments due for those.

Mr TOLLNER: So we have handed over the parks, now we are going to pay rent for the parks that we handed over, is that right?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Fong Lim, yes, the decision was made that the tenure of those parks, and I think there are, I would have to check it up, there are a number that have been granted title under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, the Commonwealth legislation, and there are four that will be granted title Territory freehold under the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act* and, as the traditional owners of those areas now hold title to those areas, the arrangements for that granting of those lands was that they then lease them back for 99 years.

Mr TOLLNER: So your answer is yes?

Mr PHELPS: That is right.

Mr TOLLNER: Right, no worries. The financial contributions from each party to the management of the park, excluding rents that the Territory government is now paying for parks that they gave away, are they equal?

Mr PHELPS: The responsibility for managing those joint-managed parks falls to the Northern Territory government as the managing authority, and the Northern Territory government pays for the management of those parks.

Mr TOLLER: Right, so what we are saying is, that we have handed over a bunch of parks, which we handed over for free, we are now paying rent for those parks, and we are also paying all of the financial requirements, funds that are required to manage those parks

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Chair, can I say in terms of the rental payments, these rental ...

A member: Interesting deal.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order! Order! Minister has the call.

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Mr HAMPTON: In terms of the rental payments and calculations they are set by the Australian Valuation Office and that is calculated by them consistent with the leases, and can I say ...

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, minister, can I stop you there? How do you calculate rent on land that can never be taken over by anyone?

Mr HAMPTON: What I am saying, member for Fong Lim, is this is ...

Mr TOLLNER: How do you put a value on ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has the call.

Mr HAMPTON: ... the rental is calculated on a combination of factors including the unimproved capital value, park visitation, the amount of infrastructure on the park, and comparisons to rent paid for other joint management parks. In terms of how rental payments will be used, that is a matter for the land councils and traditional owners of the parks.

Mr TOLLNER: So we are paying the land councils, traditional owners rent?

Mr HAMPTON: No, we are not.

Mr TOLLNER: We are not paying them rent?

Mr HAMPTON: We are but it is determined, how they use that is ...

Mr TOLLNER: Is up to them, yes, that is fine. So we are paying ...

Mr HAMPTON: Graham Phelps, have you anything to add to that?

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, no, let me finish.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Fong Lim, the minister has the capacity to answer a question, and if he wishes to ask a departmental officer who is with him to also contribute to that answer, he may.

Mr HAMPTON: So I am happy for either Susan Kirkman or for Graham Phelps to add to that.

Mr PHELPS: The arrangements to grant title and lease back the parks and reserves were made, as I understand it, was about settling questions around native title raised by the ...

Mr TOLLNER: With all due respect, that has nothing to do with the question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Fong Lim, Mr Phelps has the call.

Mr TOLLNER: A point of order, Mr Chairman!

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Mr TOLLNER: A point of order, Mr Chairman! That is not at all what I am asking. I understand the reasons why this was done. What I am trying to work out is the mechanics of what is happening and the question is, now correct me if I am wrong ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Mr TOLLNER: Hang on, I am restating the question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have heard your point of order, member for Fong Lim, and I have ruled on it. Member for Fong Lim, do not continue to talk over me. Mr Phelps has the call.

Mr PHELPS: The decision to grant title to those parks and reserves which then resulted in the need to pay rent to the holders of that title, was to resolve some questions around native title across a whole bunch of parks and reserves which were raised by the Ward case over Keep River, and that negotiated settlement has enabled us to move forward with park management on those parks and reserves and to manage those parks and reserves into the future without the uncertainty of native title hanging over the park. The negotiated arrangements, the decisions around those negotiated arrangements, which included the payment of rental and the fact that Parks and Wildlife would manage those parks and the government would pay for the management of those parks, were made at the time by those who were involved to resolve those questions.

Mr TOLLNER: Thank you for that explanation. Just to clarify in my own mind, we pay rent to traditional owners ie through the land council, but we also pay for the management costs of those parks, correct?

Mr PHELPS: That is correct.

Mr TOLLNER: Thank you, is that difficult? That is it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chair, member for Fong Lim should be reminded of Standing Order 51, no Interruptions. If he asks a question, he should allow people to answer.

A member: I think that is reciprocal.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Arafura. That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.
Output 1.2 – Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs

Mr CHANDLER: With the indulgence of the minister, you have a question on the Palmerston Water Park. The answer is asked in this output group, should fit?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, it should fit.

Mr CHANDLER: And it is just a simple one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, that is Sport and Recreation. That would be Output 8.3 Facilities and Events, sorry member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: 8.3? That is fine.

Mr WOOD: Can I just clarify?. So Parks run Leanyer and Sport and Rec will run Palmerston. What is the difference between the two of them?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, one does not exist at the moment. In terms of the appropriation and the budget they sit in different output groups at the moment.

Mr WOOD: Does Sport look after an idea and Parks takes ...

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Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: Okay, I will move on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have a question on output 1.2?

Mr WOOD: I do, I am sorry but I have to. The Howard Springs Nature Park remediation works: can we get a cost or value of that remediation works and can you explain to the many people out there why this beautiful piece of water is not allowed to be swum in still?

Mr HAMPTON: The Howard Springs Nature Park remediation works is a total of \$286 000 and that was split between two outputs. That is in 2009-10.

Mr Tollner: Do you have pigs, Gerry?

Mr WOOD: Pigs? I have not got to that yet.

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, \$500 000.

Mr WOOD: We had plenty of money left over then.

Mr HAMPTON: \$500 000 that is split between two outputs and, in terms of the water quality, I am happy to pass that over to Graham Phelps. I have been there quite a few times, talking to staff out there and, going out there before the remediation works did take place, there were significant issues, as you know, with the water quality. That was due to the bushes around the water, the main hole, they are gone but there are also significant bat colony issues and so there are still a lot of issues there. What we want to do is to make sure that it is safe for people to swim in and at this stage with the water testings it is not but I will hand over to Graham Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, as you know, the pool has been completely drained; substrates taken out; we have trimmed back trees from the edge; we have taken the barramundi out. All of this, as you also know and you may remember has been going on since we engaged consultancy company SKN to oversee the entire process to make sure that we have got the best possible process in place with the best monitoring in place, SKN is still managing the trial process.

I can inform you that the water testing results are improving. They were very bad during the wet but that is actually not atypical of previous years; with the wet season it is generally worse. Our experience when we drained the pool several years back was that the wet season results were bad and they improved in the dry season quite significantly. At the moment we are still in a monitoring phase because it is not yet back to where we were hoping it would be but we are watching very closely and we are working closely with the consultants to monitor and manage the process so that as soon as the water level does become safe we will open it for swimming.

Mr WOOD: Just a quick question. Is the water at the point of the spring suitable for swimming? Right where it comes out of the ground.

Mr PHELPS. I do not have that result right in front of me at the moment but the usual situation for this time of year is, as it comes out of the ground, which usually is at the spring itself, at this time of year it is usually fine.

Mr WOOD: So between the spring and the water, something goes wrong.

Mr PHELPS. And at the waterhole.

Mr WOOD: We could have a lovely conversation on that. Just quickly, how many meetings have the

local management group had and are they involved in decision making about the future of the park?

Mr HAMPTON: As you know, late last year, member for Nelson, we had to call for members for that particular group so they have only just been established or re-established and , with the meetings, Graham, could you provide that?

Mr PHELPS: I do not have the exact number of meetings that they have had. I think it is about three or so. They met on the 16th, which I think was yesterday. That was their most recent meeting and yes they are involved in overseeing the monitoring program and we are taking their advice into consideration with regard to when we can open it. We provided them with the latest testing results at the meeting yesterday. They are fully aware and fully involved in the process and are making quite a significant useful contribution, which is fantastic.

Mr HAMPTON: Can I also add to that just for your information, member for Nelson, the local management committee is also currently conducting a survey to gather community views on the restoration works. The survey will run for six weeks, closing on 30 June. They are also, obviously, instrumental in the review of the draft plan of management.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. That filled it in.

Mr CHAIRMAN: that concludes consideration of Output 1.2, Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs.

Output 1.3 - Parks and Reserves Conservation Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move to Output 1.3, Parks and Reserves Conservation Management Programs.

Mr CHANDLER: Just to remind me that 1.3 is to protect the natural and cultural assets of the Northern Territory. On 24 November 2009, the PPlan Action Group sent you and the minister for Planning a letter in regard to protecting Mitchell Creek in Palmerston. I quote a section from the letter:

However, the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport does not consider the catchment has sufficient conservation values to recommend declaration as a park or reserve.'

The minister for Planning responded to this very same letter. However, in his response he was far more positive saying that, ultimately, some conservation zoning under the NT Planning Scheme was accepted as part of the ongoing Eastern Suburbs Area Plan. Why is it that the minister for Planning seems to have more appreciation for Mitchell Creek and for our environment than you do?

Mr HAMPTON: I do have a great appreciation for these types of conservation areas in the Northern Territory ...

Mr CHANDLER: Well, it is not a conservation area.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of the areas you are talking about, I am happy to pass over to Graham Phelps to give you more detail on that.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, we have looked at this land and its contribution to a reserve system and its values as a park for the NT's overall reserve system, particularly under the comprehensive, adequate and representative framework of identification of parks that are worthy of declaring under section 12. It is our view that it does not meet the criteria for that.

However, I know the department has looked at it and has recommended that it be zoned for conservation, which is local conservation. It does have some values to the local community as a

conservation area, but not of the values that would merit it being declared as a section 12 park.

Mr CHANDLER: The reason I raise it today is I am aware of so many different cities around the country that, at a later stage, decide that a certain creek that has just been let to be an urban drain, they then want to spend millions of dollars to re-establish that area and, with a little planning, we could do that now. We could set aside that area and protect it so that it is given the care now, rather than later. That is the only reason for the question today.

Mr WOOD: Can I make a comment? If that happens, every creek in the Litchfield Shire which Litchfield Council maintains can be taken over for that reason, I will be pushing for Parks and Wildlife to take them over because Litchfield Council does maintain those creeks. I understand where you are coming from, but I just think it has to have an even approach taken for the conservation of those creeks.

Mr CHANDLER: Are you saying that rural areas should be treated as equal?

Mr WOOD: Of course, as regards the environment.

Members interjecting.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I suggest that while we have the minister here, we put to the minister.

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: No, I just remind the member for Palmerston there is a lot of history in regard to these creeks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You talk about it over scones tomorrow.

Mr CHANDLER: Just one last question, minister. Tree Point Beach on Gunn Point is suffering due to illegal vehicle access. Can you please detail what measures the department is taking to protect this area?

Mr WOOD: I asked that. That was a question in parliament.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is right. They pinched your question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I remind members of Standing Order 51, No interruption.

Mr WOOD: All right.

Mr HAMPTON: I am certainly happy to get Graham Phelps to answer that question.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Brennan, the Tree Point Conservation Reserve abuts the Gunn Point land owned by the Northern Territory Land Corporation, and Parks and Wildlife has responsibility for managing the Tree Point conservation area. We have signage erected in the area informing people not to travel on the beach through the Tree Point Conservation Area, which minimises the risk that those vehicles will cause any erosion problems, and we also patrol that area with our rangers on a regular basis, and particularly on weekends, and when the people are likely to be camping in the Gunn Point area. We proactively get out and talk to people, and tell them of the requirement not to, there is no restriction on vehicle access in the Gunn Point area on the beach, it is not land that we manage, but we proactively inform people that they cannot cross past the Tree Point area.

Mr CHANDLER: A subsequent question. In the few times I have visited the area, I would put it to you

that the signs are not working, because there are plenty of vehicles that are getting access to the area. Have there been any fines issued for driving people that are driving on the beach?

Mr HAMPTON: I am advised that we have had one infringement notice for driving on Tree Point beach.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, excellent. I am happy with that.

Mr WOOD: Following on from that, I would have loved to continue with that on that Tree Point and Gunn Point beach, but in relation to the Tree Point reserve, have you continued the removal of Poinciana trees at Tree Point Conservation Reserve?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Mr Graham Phelps to answer that one.

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, I might have to take that one on notice, because I did not prepare for that one today.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Question on Notice No 8.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, would you mind repeating that?

Mr WOOD: Minister, have you continued with the removal of Poinciana trees at Tree Point Conservation Reserve?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.4. And just a matter of housekeeping for officials, when you are taking notice of a question on notice, could you please take note of the question number, and if you have the opportunity, or if there is an opportunity to answer that later in the Estimates Committee process, can you please quote that number so the Hansard can find it easily.

Mr WOOD: Following on from the member for Brennan's question about the beach, I put to the government a number of times, would they look at stationing a ranger there and having discussions with NT Land Corporation, so that there can be a joint management of that beach area?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, as Mr Phelps has pointed out, rangers do visit Tree Point Conservation area at least twice a week, and there are currently no plans for a station.

Mr WOOD: People know when the rangers have been and gone, and that is unfortunate. All right, I will move on. In relation to Howard Springs Nature Park, has there been any program to get rid of the pigs, because, in past times, and I have met the shooters, they did shoot them out, why is there not a plan to rid the park of pigs?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly, in terms of Howard Springs and pigs, the advice I have received is that they are controlled by trapping them and then being destroyed. As I said, on talking to rangers there, the bigger issue of that particular issue is the bat colony, particularly in terms of the spring, the main water hole. As you know, shooting does not occur in the Nature Park.

Mr WOOD: It used to.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, it is an issue, being close to residential leasing in that particular vicinity of

Darwin.

Mr WOOD: So just face the guns the other way. Minister, it is only one area that is residential.

Mr HAMPTON: I do not know if Graham Phelps has anything further to add to that. Mr Phelps?

Mr PHELPS: Member for Nelson, we do do trapping and opportunistic shooting in the areas where it is safe to do at the Howard Springs Nature Park. We also shoot in the Hunting Reserve in Shoal Bay, which are a bit of a source for those animals, so there is an ongoing active peak management control program in those suite of parks which are above each other to Howard Springs.

Mr HAMPTON: And in terms of that, just to let you know, there are about 331 permits to hunt that were issued in 2009-10.

Mr WOOD: But not in Howard Springs Nature Park, that would be a bit dangerous.

Mr HAMPTON: That is Shoal Bay Coastal Reserve.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I know. This is little tiny Howard Springs Nature Park that has pigs in it, should not be there, and they are not being removed by traps. Anyway, I will move on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration Output 1.3, Parks and Reserves Conservation Management Programs.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – BIOLOGICAL PARKS
Output 2.1 – Biological Parks

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move on to Output Group 2, Biological Parks, Output 2.1, Biological Parks.

Mr CHANDLER: Not that I do not think that Biological Parks is important, but in the interests of time I am going to have to step over that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

OUTPUT 3.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES
Output 3.1 – Natural Resources Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move on to Output Group 3.0 Natural Resources, Output 3.1 Natural Resources Management.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, Budget Paper No 2 page 50 refers to \$3m over three years for feral camel management. Can you please advise if this Commonwealth money, or is this is in addition to the funding for this initiative by the Commonwealth?

Mr HAMPTON: In terms, member for Brennan, of this government's commitment we have provided and we have committed \$3m to the feral camel management plan. We have also increased the funding for 2009-10 for \$17 000. So, \$3m of Territory money is ...

Mr CHANDLER: It is Territory money, not Commonwealth?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that is right.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I understand all parks and reserves under the Parks and Wildlife Service Management are required to have an annual conservation plan for weeds, fire and feral animal management. My question is: is it these plans that are used to set budgets to manage any concerns that are raised.

Mr HAMPTON: What output are we in?

Mr CHANDLER: Natural Resources Management, mitigate potential threats, erosion, weeds, bushfires, floods and feral animals.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, that is probably Output Group 1.3.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, this is the output of Natural Resources.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are into the output of Natural Resources. The question was in relation to Parks.

Mr Tollner: Thank God you are here, Marion, pull the minister into line. Pull the Chair into line as well.

Mr CHANDLER: Can I just clarify? It says:

access managed and conserve the natural resources of the Northern Territory, provide integrated support and advisory monitoring and regulatory services in respect of the Territory's natural resources and, with the involvement of the community and land managers, mitigate potential threats, erosion, weeds, bushfires, floods and feral animals.

Mr GRANT: If I understand the question correctly, the park management plans inform those annual plans, yes, they do determine how we allocate resources.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Thank you. In regard to Natural Resource Management given that this is the prerequisite for natural resources including floods and feral animals, what area does the minister expect questions on crocodile management and other feral animal management to be asked under?

Mr HAMPTON: They would be under this Output 3.0 Natural Resources.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you.

Mr HAMPTON: Are you right with that, 3.1?

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, excellent. Then I can continue with this line of question. If these plans are used for budgeting purposes to management weeds, fire and feral animals how have camels become such a problem over the years? Have camels been overlooked in any plans and, if they have been identified, why is the situation being ignored to the extent of the out of control situation we have now?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, they certainly have not been ignored, as I said, through Desert Knowledge CRC and NT One, the company, and in partnership with Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory government acknowledges that feral camels are a major issue for us. That is why we are working in a tri-state effort to control feral camels, in many cases in terms of land management.

Some of those responsibilities in the past have fallen on landowners and certainly to pastoralists. I know in the Centre many pastoralists have undertaken those sort of management programs themselves, but I am happy to provide, and I will get Jim brown to add to that, but our commitment is second to none. We have committed \$3m it is on the table. In partnership with Desert Knowledge CRC NT1 we are keen to work with them on the Camel Action Plan and a National Action Plan.

I think my predecessor also really did lead the charge for the ministerial council on this issue which is why we now have a national action plan for camels.

Mr GRANT: I do appreciate that, minister, but the question relates to the fact that these are annual plans that are put in place to manage our natural resources. We have gone from, my understanding is, less than probably a couple of hundred thousand camels 10 years ago to a million camels today. Where has it gone wrong? How have we got to a million camels if they have not been managed?

Mr HAMPTON: They have been managed. As I have said in the past, they have been managed in relation to individual landowners and what we now have is a national action to manage them and to eradicate the numbers. As you said, they are prolific breeders. They are prolific wanderers. They do not know state boundaries. They will travel anywhere according to water sources and I will get Mr Jim Grant to maybe add a bit further to that.

Mr GRANT: They have all come in from Western Australia.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr GRANT: I just endorse what the minister says. The pastoral land, Aboriginal land and our parks make up a very small part of the camel problem. They cross state boundaries, and they cross (inaudible). But I would say a tiny fraction of the camels in central Australia are in national parks.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. Can the minister advise how the department is going to manage the crocodile exclusion zone given it has not been provided with additional human resources?

Mr HAMPTON: With regard to crocodile management, where you do have the crocodile management plan that was signed off by the federal minister as it has to be under that legislation, they are a protected species and in terms of the economic use of that animal and in terms of protecting it, that is what the crocodile management plan does. In terms of the safety issues with crocodiles, particularly in the Top End and the Darwin harbour area, we did announce last year, an extension to that Croc Management Zone a 50 kilometre management zone in and around Darwin harbour.

We have managed it in terms of our current resources with the croc management team, Tommy Nichols and the crew do a fantastic job ...

A member: Hear! Hear!

Mr HAMPTON: ... and we have also provided an extra croc boat last year as part of the Croc Wise strategy. We have provided an additional 20 traps to be placed around the Darwin harbour within that 50 kilometre management zone and, as you know, we did go out to expressions of interest to see what interest is out there in the private sector in terms of further management of that 50 kilometre zone.

That is where it is at. The expressions of interest have come back. We had seven people express an interest. Those expressions of interest are still with my department and we are assessing those as we speak but I am not sure if Mr Grant has anything further to add. I think our efforts in terms of crocodile management, particularly in the Darwin harbour area, has been fairly significant to date.

Mr GRANT: I think we are still concluding that process but we are very close to completing it.

Mr CHANDLER: My worry is that, while it is fantastic that we have additional boats, 20 additional traps which are all valuable resources for the staff to use, but, to me, that is just adding to their job and we have not seemed to add to their human resources capability.

Mr HAMPTON: Just in terms of our Croc Management Plan as well that was signed off by the federal minister in September last year.

As I said, it is important that there is an economic opportunity here as well and with that management

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plan there was an increase in the egg harvesting and a ceiling to 50 000 live eggs. That is in the first two years of the plan's five year life, increasing to 60 000 live eggs in subsequent two years and, finally, to 70 000 eggs in the last year.

But in managing the population, that is a very important part of managing the population growth that we see with crocodiles.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you please advise that traditional owners have been consulted in regards to the crocodile management plan?

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of the federal government plan or the Croc Wise plan?

Mr CHANDLER: The current plan that you are talking about now?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly, as far as I am aware, but I am happy for Mr Grant to talk about the process of where we have got to with the Croc Management Plan.

Mr GRANT: I might, if it is okay, refer that to John.

Mr WOINARSKI: Woinarski, Director of Biodiversity Conservation. The management plan for saltwater crocodiles went through a series of public consultations including detailed consultations with land owners. We revised the plan in light of those commentaries and comments from the Australian department of Environment. We explicitly sought to provide, or to facilitate, economic development on Aboriginal lands through the crocodile management plan, through provision of egg allocations, particularly in Aboriginal lands. Any such harvesting economic development on those lands through the crocodile industry must be regulated through the Northern Land Council. So, all landowners are involved in that process as well, through the land council.

Mr HAMPTON: Can I also add there have been efforts to get a group of traditional owners together on a board and looking at the management of crocodiles. I have met with them on a couple of occasions, as early as this year, and they are very keen to get involved. I have put to that group of traditional owners as well, that I would be really keen to get their advice on not only a federal government's and our crocodile management plan, of how we manage the population and the economic benefits, but also in Crocwise, the strategy and safety. When I met with them, I put that to them, and I will continue to work with them as well.

Mr CHANDLER: I have a few questions in regard to some of the issues with eggs and product gained across jurisdiction into Queensland and so forth.

Mr HAMPTON: All right.

Mr CHANDLER: I might put them in a letter to you, and you just answer them that way, if that is okay? Can you advise when the last census was conducted on the Mary River system in regard to crocodile numbers?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to give this to Mr Woinarski to answer that one.

Mr WOINARSKI: Yes, last year.

Mr CHANDLER: Last year? Excellent.

Mr WOINARSKI: Yes.

Mr CHANDLER: And how much of the current budget is directed to crocodile research?

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Mr WOINARSKI: Me again?

Mr HAMPTON: Sure.

Mr WOINARSKI: The monitoring component of our crocodile management is about \$70 000 to \$100 000 per year.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Moving off crocodiles, minister. The Draft Marine Protected Area Strategy is now two years overdue. When is this strategy likely to be released?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: The Marine Park Strategy is being held up by the Blue Mud Bay issues mostly, and we are hoping to have something out by the end of this year.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Does that strategy include a time frame of delivering a network of marine sanctuaries?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: It would have a time line for the establishment of some sanctuaries, but the sanctuaries that related to Indigenous areas at that time were not, I do not think, the exact. But, certainly the ones that relate to other areas will have a timetable.

Mr CHANDLER: Right, thank you. Moving on to biodiversity, could you tell me about the Lesser Stick Nest Rat. Is this still extinct?

Mr HAMPTON: That is a very good question, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: I understand the Central Rock Rat has been rediscovered, and I congratulate the department on finding that particular rat. So, it was a logical question.

Mr HAMPTON: I will hand that over to Mr Woinarski.

Mr CHANDLER: There might be some history here.

Mr WOINARSKI: Following your line of humour, there are actually two Stick Nest Rats - the Greater and the Lesser.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes.

Mr WOINARSKI: One is now extinct, unfortunately.

Mr CHANDLER: The Lesser?

Mr WOINARSKI: Yes.

Mr WOOD: That is why it was lesser.

Mr CHANDLER: Could you tell me also how many species have had their status downgraded from threatened, endangered or, in fact, extinct?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Woinarski.

Mr WOINARSKI: Sure. The question is nuanced in that there is both a listing of threatened species in Australia-wide and a list in the Northern Territory. The two are not necessarily identical. For the Northern Territory, we review the threatened status at roughly four- to five-year intervals, and it will be done this year. That is when we will consider whether some species will be upgraded, downgraded, or delisted.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Moving on to weeds if I can, minister, can you please provide detail into why the budget for the Strategic Weed Management Program has been slashed, and I know that is a bad term, from \$640 000 down to \$450 000. Is the weed problem not as bad today as it was last year?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly, in terms of the weeds and the programs that we have, we do have a list of weeds that we list as weeds, basically, but I am happy for Diana Leeder to answer that question.

Ms LEEDER: Diana Leeder, Executive Director, Natural Resources. Member for Brennan, the budget in 2009-10 actually included some additional money from a previous program, and so what we have then in the ongoing years is the new allocation to it without a carry forward from some previously unexpended funds, so that actually enabled us to spend some time and effort into devising the Strategic Weed Management Program, and then work out the implementation and commence that in more strategically targeted areas, rather than just hit and miss.

Mr CHANDLER: Excellent. Minister, has any research been undertaken in regard to the viability of harvesting mimosa for distilling tannin? And the follow-up question to that is, is it something that the government would consider?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, I am happy for Diana Leeder to answer that.

Ms LEEDER: I am not sure that research has been done into that particular aspect of use of mimosa, but I know, from time to time, including as recently as today, the department is approached by organisations from outside the Territory suggesting that they are interested in carrying out that research. I would have to take on notice what the requests about mimosa were, but I know a couple of years ago some research was done and found not to be viable.

Question on Notice No 8.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to ask that question on notice?

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, if I can, fine. Can I add something to that, though. Actually, it is a separate question on mimosa, and that is I am aware of, sorry ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, we will move on - do you want to ask that question on notice?

Mr CHANDLER: Has any research been undertaken in regard to the viability of harvesting mimosa for distilling the tannin?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.5.

Mr CHANDLER: And if I can, just a follow on to that, I am aware, down on the Mary River system, and isn't that terrible, I cannot think of the property name ...

Mr Wood: Melaleuca.

Mr CHANDLER: ... Melaleuca, where there was mimosa found to be dead and no one could explain why, and I believe that there was going to be some research undertaken to find out how it died. Do you have any more information on that?

Mr HAMPTON: I will pass that to Diana Leeder for further information on that one.

Ms LEEDER: I do not know, member for Brennan, whether I can actually answer that specific question. I know that the department has used a number of biocontrol agents and released those in particular areas. Some of those have been particularly effective and some less effective. I cannot answer the particular question about the patch of mimosa at Melaleuca.

Mr WOOD: It is more than a patch, actually.

Ms LEEDER: Well, the large area.

Mr Tollner: Maybe you could take it on notice.

Ms LEEDER: I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you repeat that question for Hansard?

Mr CHANDLER: Can we find that information in regard to mimosa that had died on the station at Melaleuca?

Mr HAMPTON: I might also add that, under the current program, Caring for our Country, along with the Indigenous Land Corporation, there are projects for mimosa management, and that is up to next year, July next year. NRETAS is assisting the Northern Land Council with developing a new Caring for Country application, but certainly, in terms of that, there might be some answers there as well from the Northern Land Council.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Brennan's question on notice is No 8.6.

Mr WOOD: I have a question about the Crocodile Management Plan. Minister, I believe you are going to go to a private management plan, because you have not increased the number of staff, but you have increased the number of traps, put in an extra boat, unless those couple of people you have possess many hands and travel around quickly they are not going to be able to use all that equipment.

There is a philosophical question that has never been debated. You are Parks and Wildlife; crocodiles are part of our wildlife. You have qualified people working in that area and you mentioned them before. Why does the park not simply put that money which is going into privatisation into getting extra people? Perhaps employing more Indigenous people? We spoke earlier about rangers for looking after fisheries. Why do we not go down that path because surely catching crocodiles is only part of the question? It is about a total picture of management and they are part of our native fauna. So, really, has the government basically made up its mind that this management plan will be privatised and not be part of a basic function of your department?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, we certainly have not made up our mind. As I have stated, we wanted to feel what interest was out there in the private sector; I think there are many people with a lot of experience up here in the private sector who may do a good job, as well. I think if we were to go

down that path – and I am not saying we are – then obviously that may free up those people to do crocodile management in other parts of the Top End, particularly, but I think there are great opportunities through *A Working Future*, the growth towns, to also look at how we can provide these opportunities in crocodile management monitoring to many larger Indigenous communities along the coast. But it is just, as I said, expressions of interest. I wanted to test the private sector to see what interest is out there, what expertise. We have not made our decision, but I will certainly take your comments on board.

Mr WOOD: Just a final question on that. Within the Darwin region, there is Malacca Swamp, Shoal Bay Conservation Area, Tree Point, Howard Springs Hunting Reserve, Howard Springs itself, Holmes Jungle, Charles Darwin National Park, I do not know whether I want to include Berry Springs Park in it, but when it comes to removing crocodiles, if I was to stick up for the rights of crocodiles – I am not saying we should not remove them from places – and Black Jungle, unfortunately there was a death there - is it your department's policy that crocodiles will be removed from conservation reserves where you would think they would be allowed to remain because they are conservation reserves? So, are you going to basically remove crocodiles - well, you have these reserves and they are reserves because they protect our wildlife - if you are going to take crocodiles out of there, is that the way you should manage these parks? I want to know if crocodiles are safe in your parks, or are you going to get rid of them?

Mr HAMPTON: I might get John Woinarski to answer that. For me, the CrocWise strategy is about public safety.

Mr WOOD: That is right.

Mr HAMPTON: And that is why we have the 50 km management zone. In terms of problem crocodiles, we also remove those on top of the other crocodiles that we remove in our management zone, but in terms of our parks ...

Mr WOOD: That zone will cover all your parks in that area?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get John to answer the rest of that.

Mr WOINARSKI: Actually, your question is about parks, with respect, so it could well have come under the previous output. The management of crocodiles in parks is related both to the crocodiles' status and the interactions with humans and as policy of the parks as specified in the management plan that crocodiles will be removed if they pose a danger, real or potential, to human safety. So, where there is any likelihood of people swimming, crocodiles will be removed from parks.

Mr HAMPTON: For example, we do have traps in some of our parks where they do pose a public safety risk, and they will be removed.

Mr WOOD: All right. Thank you.

Mr TOLLNER: A couple of questions, very simple. Minister, can you tell me how many geese were shot in the Northern Territory at the last goose hunting season by waterfowl hunting permit holders and by people who do not hold hunting permits?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, I will see if this answers your question. As you said, it is a fairly simple one. What I can say is that there were a total of 1565 water fowl hunting permits issued in 2008, 1854 in 2009. There has been a total of one infringement notice issued in relation to the use...

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, number of birds, or in this particular occasion, magpie geese shot.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. Just looking down, and I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr TOLLNER: I will be very specific here. I will give it to you on notice. I am after information on how many magpie geese have been shot by people with water fowl hunting permits? That should be fairly easy to obtain.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.7

Mr TOLLNER: What might be a little bit more difficult to obtain is magpie geese that have been shot by people who are not required to have a water fowl hunting permit.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So question No 8.7.

Mr TOLLNER: One more question, minister, another very simple one, I am sure you will have this at your fingertips. What plans are in place to increase the number of hunting reserves in the Top End?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Fong Lim, I am happy to pass that on to Graham. Permits of Parks and Reserves, that probably would relate to another Output Group that we have already gone through, but Graham Phelps might have the answer. Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: There are currently no plans to create additional hunting reserves.

Mr TOLLNER: How do you intend to placate the growing number of hunters in the Top End?

Mr PHELPS: We work very closely with the various representative bodies of the shooters' associations to work with them to identify hunting opportunities. The Territory's parks and reserves make up about 3.6% of the Territory's land mass. There is a vast area often parks which would also be suitable for hunting reserves over which we do not have access control.

Mr TOLLNER: Very quickly, have there been any hunting reserves closed in the last ten years?

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: I need to take one on notice to check about the times and dates.

Mr TOLLNER: No worries, that is fine.

Question on Notice No 8.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr TOLLNER: Have there been any hunting reserves closed in the Top End in the last ten years?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is number 8.8.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That sees the conclusions of the questions at 3.1.

Output 3.2 - Flood Forecasting

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move on to Output 3.2, Flood Forecasting. Are there any questions?

Mr CHANDLER: I only have one question on this. Minister, can you tell me what lessons have been learnt from the Barkly flooding this year?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I presume you are talking about the Barkly Highway and, in particular, I suppose that would be more of a question for the minister for Infrastructure.

Mr CHANDLER: Not so much concern about the road infrastructure but, about were there any lessons from that particular high level of rainfall? I mean, you hear the term often a hundred year floods.

Mr HAMPTON: One in a hundred year floods.

Mr CHANDLER: One in a hundred year floods. I am assuming that the cloud would come around every hundred years so we do not get a chance to see them that often. Were there any specific lessons that we could take from the fact that we have had one of those experiences that could help us with other flood forecasting?

Mr HAMPTON: I am certainly happy to pass that on to Diana Leeder.

Ms LEEDER: Member for Brennan, I am not sure that I am able to help you with that. The department has a rolling plan of upgrading gauging stations that are used for the flood forecasting information that we provide. Where areas that there are insufficient stations are identified, then we add that to the program. The program is developed, not just through NRETAS but with the emergency services and other agencies. So, there is an annual meeting of looking at the forward plan for it. My suggestion would be that probably this issue will come up at the next meeting of that, in whether there were any gaps in the forecasting network. I am not sure whether that answers satisfactorily for you ...

Mr CHANDLER: Absolutely.

Ms LEEDER: ... but there is a process for identifying gaps.

Question on Notice No 8.9

Mr HAMPTON: I might just add to that. It is a good question and I am happy to take that on as well as a question on notice, if you like. NRETAS is in its final phase of a three-year upgrade program to all gauging stations. Looking at the current list of sites, there are none in the Barkly. I am happy to take that away and have a look at it. With all respects it was a 1 in 100-year flood that did occur. It is an unusual circumstance.

Mr CHANDLER: Yes, absolutely. Perhaps the question should be: if there are any lessons learnt at the next meeting from what happened with this 100-year flood, can we have some feedback?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.9.

Mr CHANDLER: That is all I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No, I am right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes questions to Output 3.2, Flood Forecasting.

Output 3.3 – Water Resources

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now move onto Output 3.3, Water Resources.

Mr CHANDLER: Can you please advise why landowners in the Katherine area have taken court action in regard to water allocations in that area?

Mr HAMPTON: Happy to take that question, member for Brennan. In terms of our water management issues, it is a very serious issue for us for the Northern Territory and the government. What I can say is, in our rivers, our water sources, I do not want to see what happened down south with the Murray River and the Darling River systems, where it has been completely overused. One of the main things I am looking at doing through the National Water Initiatives is rolling out water management plans across the Northern Territory.

As you may be aware, we do have the Katherine Water Management Plan we already have in place. Regarding the legal action, as that is before the courts, I am not prepared to talk about that.

Mr WOOD: Can you actually state what the action is? From whom it is?

Mr HAMPTON: I can say that people are certainly entitled to test their positions legally ...

Mr CHANDLER: Test the water.

Mr HAMPTON: Test the water, so to speak, member for Brennan. I am happy for Diana Leeder to talk, if she can, a bit more about that.

Ms LEEDER: I cannot talk about the detail of the appeals, but they were appeals against the licence allocations, which is a perfectly normal situation whenever a water allocation plan is introduced across Australia, particularly to areas where there is full, or almost full, allocation. People test those decisions.

Mr CHANDLER: No, I am happy with that. I suppose, in this case, you need to appreciate from this chair, I do not see what happens at the different levels within a department. But, there are some things that come up from time to time, particularly in the relation to the Mataranka water area plan. One of the questions I have been asked was why was there a different methodology applied to developing the water plan in Katherine and the Mataranka area? It seems to be a different methodology that was applied to measuring water; how the water was measured; over what period of time. I am just interested why we would not have a pretty standard methodology wherever the water is?

Mr HAMPTON: I can say the water allocation plans are developed specifically for each water resource. The ones you have just mentioned, obviously, have different water resources and different scientific things about it. So, these plans are developed with the best science available, and in full consultation with the community to discuss and decide on what water resources management plan should be applied according to that water resource.

There are currently four water planning processes under way. We have the Western Davenport Ranges, the Mataranka/Tindal process, Ooloo/dolostone process, as well as the Tiwi Islands.

Regarding your question, it depends on the water resource.

Mr WOOD: And the Howard East bore field.

Ms LEEDER: Member for Brennan, I think the issue between Mataranka and Katherine is simply an issue of the available knowledge, and the available records and different processes. That way, the methodology for water allocation planning is a fairly straightforward methodology, but it draws on the available knowledge, and it errs on the side of caution in favour of the environment.

Mr HAMPTON: And in terms of what the member for Nelson said, he is right. It is expected that planning processes will also commence for the Great Artesian Basin Water Management Plan there, Howard East Aquifer, and Berry Springs this year.

Mr CHANDLER: I suppose that one of the particular questions is that, I think we all must agree that the old records are perhaps more inaccurate than they were when they were first taken. Why are we going back so far in certain areas but not in other areas?

Ms LEEDER: Member for Brennan, I think that some of these issues about how scientific information is used or gathered can always be the subject of subjective interpretation, and there is a lot more to the process of interpreting information and developing the models. The more information that is available, the more secure the model is likely to be, because it takes over a longer period of time. I know that the issue of the records used for Katherine and for Mataranka is a locally vexed issue, but nevertheless, the department planners are working through systematically to make sure that the best knowledge is applied to the outcome from that.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. The last question I have on the subject is the same question I had last year, and we are now another year down the track, and we still have got a particular property down there that has not had a licence approved, knocked back, and I believe that this has been in play for close on five years now. I mean, I would hate to be a taxi driver waiting on a licence to get a job if you have got to wait five years. Why has this process taken so long?

Mr HAMPTON: Which process are you talking about, which water allocation?

Mr CHANDLER: To approve or not approve a water allocation licence.

Mr HAMPTON: The one in Katherine or Mataranka?

Mr CHANDLER: In Mataranka.

Mr HAMPTON: Mataranka. I will ask Diana Leeder to talk on that.

Ms LEEDER: Member for Brennan, there were a couple of issues related to that, as came up in the question last year. One of them was related to the fact that, prior to some amendments to the *Water Act*, an application for licence could be pending, and the particular properties in question had requested that their licence applications be pending be held. Advice was provided to the department that either those applications should be withdrawn or processed, and so discussion was entered into with the applicants to determine which process they wished to go through. Once they determined that they, which was post this time last year, that they wished for their applications to be processed, then there is a normal due process time, in terms of advertising, seeking submissions, taking into consideration particular aspects of that, indicating the intention to make a decision, and seeking response to that. That process is almost complete now, I think, tomorrow is the close of one part of that process, after which it will be finalised.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. No more questions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I will just give you one farm we know opposes these changes, and they have been trying to reach an agreement with the government over that. Has any agreement been able to be reached?

Ms LEEDER: Member for Nelson, that is the application I was referring to where I said that tomorrow is the end of one process in terms of seeking comment back, and then a final decision will be made and conveyed next week.

Mr WOOD: And just quickly, in relation to rural areas. When do we expect to see more discussions on a water allocation plan for the rural areas? In other words, how far is it down the path with coming to completion? Is the department still monitoring the voluntary water bores in the rural area?

Mr HAMPTON: I will get Diana Leeder to answer that.

Ms LEEDER: Member for Nelson, on current activity we are anticipating commencing the more active involvement with the community over the Darwin rural area water allocation plan later this year, within the next few months, I believe. With the voluntary bores, those people who have been willing to continue to provide us with information, then we receive that because the more we can get from as many people as possible helps give the broader picture for that. So, I think the planning process in terms of the establishment of a community committee will be a little bit later this year.

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Chair, I am happy to table questions taken on notice, numbers 8.3, 8.4 and 8.7.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That concludes consideration of Output 3.3 Water Resources.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – ENVIRONMENT SUSTAINABILITY
Output 4.1 – Environment Sustainability

Mr CHAIRMAN: We move on to consideration of Output Group 4.0 Environment Sustainability, Output 4.1 Environment and Sustainability.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, recently we have seen high levels of *E.coli* in our harbour and you continually battered away responsibility stating it was the Health department issue. The same week we have the Health department minister come out and state that it was not his department's role to check the water in the harbour

Minister, I know the responsibility of checking our water rests with NRETAS Can you advise what monitoring has occurred to date, how often, and what locations around the harbour; has random sampling taken place before the *E.coli* events over the last few weeks, not including samples taken from the harbour and port last year - so, since the last report card was done and now.

Mr HAMPTON: I have been fairly vocal in terms of protecting our harbour. It is a certainly a priority of this government and, in terms of monitoring the health of the harbour, we will continue to do so. As I said in the last sittings, I actually tabled all the sites we do currently monitor through the Aquatic Health Unit. As I said, there is a total of 51 monitoring sites, 28 of those are estuarine sites are in the Darwin harbour catchment and we monitor those on a quarterly basis; and we monitor 23 fresh water sites on an annual basis. All the 28 estuarine sites were last sampled on the dates of May 10, 11 and 12.

As I stated in parliament at the time, it takes around three days to sample all those sites across the harbour. Officers are out monitoring again this week, as I understand, and certainly I have been waiting to see what expert advice we get on the source in the location of *E.coli*; it certainly has been a public health issue, certainly in terms of the Health department. These are questions, I suppose, that should have been asked, or may be asked, of the Health minister. But I am happy to get Matt to ...

Mr CHANDLER: I am actually happy with the answer; you have given me the answer to the question. Can you explain in regard to Aquatic Health Reports to the minister, page 222 Budget Paper No 3, for

priority catchment drops from six down to two for the next financial year.

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, can you just repeat that.

Mr CHANDLER: Why the reports to the minister have dropped from six last year to two in the next financial year?

Mr HAMPTON: Do you want to answer that, Mr Grant?

Mr GRANT: Member for Brennan, I think we will have to take that one on notice.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay, that is fine.

Question on Notice No 8.10

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you please repeat the question, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: In regard to aquatic health reports to the minister, on page 222, Budget Paper No 3, for priority catchment drops from six down to two for the next financial year.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.10.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, NRETAS signs off on water discharge licences, can you please advise what discharge licence exists for the raw sewage that flows from the Berrimah Prison Farm into our harbour, and what monitoring program is in place for this discharge site?

Mr HAMPTON: I tabled in the last parliamentary sittings a list of all the water discharge licences that we do have with licensees in the Darwin Harbour area. But I am happy for Mr Grant ...

Mr CHANDLER: This is in particular to the prison site which I could not find any reference for any licence.

Mr HAMPTON: In particular that one there. Matt Darcey can answer.

Mr DARCEY: Matt Darcey, Executive Director Environment and Heritage. We currently do not have a waste discharge licence on the prison site. We are working with the Department of Justice to try to get up a discharge licence. There are occasional discharges in the Wet Season, but it is one that we are working on.

Mr CHANDLER: Okay. So, at the moment, we do not have any idea how much of this effluent there is, how it is treated, or what kind of impact it has on the harbour or the environment at all?

Mr DARCEY: I am sorry, I cannot answer that question. I will have to take that on notice. I just do not know the answer.

Question on Notice No 8.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please repeat the question.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you have any idea how much treatment this effluent is provided prior to discharge or how much damage this is causing the harbour?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.11.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, what improvements have Power and Water made to the water discharge into Buffalo Creek since the issue was raised last year and you promised to come down hard on that particular issue?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Brennan. Buffalo Creek discharge by Power and Water is not acceptable. It needs to be improved and we are taking steps, as I said last year, to improve that to make sure it does not happen.

Mr CHANDLER: Can you detail what those steps are?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. In terms of Buffalo Creek flows to Shoal Bay, it receives treated sewage discharge from Leanyer/Sanderson waste water treatment plant. Both my department and researchers from the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge Research Consortium have been doing monitoring and research on the water and sediments of the creek. The results suggest that high nutrient loads from the treatment plant coupled with limited tidal flushings are creating high levels of nutrients in episodes of extreme oxygen depletion in the creek. This is what gave Buffalo Creek such a poor report in our recent harbour report card.

As I said, that is in the public arena. It is nothing that we are trying to hide. It is in the public domain. What is happening at the moment is my department is now in negotiations with Power and Water Corporation on clear actions to remediate the creek system. There is more detailed modelling of the water flows and dispersion that is occurring. Monitoring by my department is ongoing. Licensing beyond the current 2011 licence period will be dependent on the demonstration of real improvements and I am not sure if Mr Darcey would want to add to that.

Mr DARCEY: No I do not have a great deal to add to that.

Mr GRANT: I could just add, perhaps, clarification. What Power and Water does to ameliorate the problem is not really our business. What we are doing is setting the target. So what we are speaking to them about is what they have to deliver and how they deliver it is really their business.

Mr CHANDLER: I am happy with that. I could talk about the harbour all day. Probably the last question to wrap it up is: minister, has a long term environmental study been done to provide baseline information how a growing Darwin, Palmerston and Weddell and its increasing sewage levels, may affect our harbour.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of the *Environmental Impact Assessment Act*, it is a very big body of work and we did commission the Environmental Protection Authority to do as we announced recently with the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee, we have endorsed and supported their call for a integrated monitoring and research plan for the Darwin Harbour and that has been supported by the government. I do not know if that answers your question but there are certainly two important bodies of work that we have commissioned and we have supported.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. I note the recent announcement about a complementary solar power system for the Watarrka National Park Ranger Station, and I congratulate you on that initiative. However, within the scope of the Greening the Territory Initiative, one of the specific tasks was to develop a detailed proposal for substituting a large component of diesel generation with renewable energy in remote communities, including financing and funding option by 30 April, this year. Has that proposal been delivered to you?

Mr HAMPTON: Is that in this output area?

Mr CHANDLER: I hope so, it is about the environment and sustainability.

Mr DARCEY: We would have to take that question on notice, I think.

Question on Notice No 8.12

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you mind repeating it, member for Brennan?

Mr CHANDLER: I will not repeat the part where I congratulated you.

Mr HAMPTON: Please? You do not do it very often.

Mr CHANDLER: Within the scope of the Greening the Territory initiative, one of the specific tasks was to develop a detailed proposal for substituting a large component of diesel generation with renewable energy in remote communities. That was due on 30 April. Has that proposal been delivered to you?

The CHAIRMAN: That is question 8.12.

Mr CHANDLER: Do you concede recent events in and around our harbour have uncovered serious shortcomings within our environmental processes? Given that we do live in a world of self-regulation, can you assist me with understanding how you or your department would ever know of a breach, even a small one, if when reports are submitted the results are, let us say, moderated. Do you have any random inspection programs? Do you have any inspectors who might undertake follow-up samples the day before or, perhaps, the day after a department, business enterprise, or company undertake their own sampling?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to pass that on to my officers.

Mr DARCEY: The licensing regime is self-reporting. We do not have random compliance checks. We expect the licence holders to report annually, in most cases. If there are any breaches in the meantime, we expect them to report to us on that.

Mr CHANDLER: We expect a lot.

Mr DARCEY: No. The recent announcement by the minister about increasing resources in that area will help alleviate that.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. The Country Liberals released its very practical climate change pollution reduction policy last year, and you and your government criticised it strongly because it was not linked to a carbon pollution reduction scheme and, further, went on to say that a climate change policy must be linked to a national CPRS or it will fail. Where does this now leave your own climate change policy, given the Prime Minister has now walked away from what he described as the greatest moral challenge of our generation - walked away, backflipped on his CPRS? How does your policy expect to work, given it was linked? And remember, it had to be linked to succeed. How will your policy now work without the national CPRS or ETS?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am happy to answer that, but that is related to a different output group in my portfolio responsibilities. It is the climate change policy. There is a climate change output in here.

Mr TOLLNER: Now he has given me a heads up. What is coming?

Mr CHANDLER: All right. I am happy to – even though that is probably finished now. It rests with the Chief Minister, does it not?

Mr HAMPTON: No. I am happy to answer questions on climate change as Minister for Climate Change.

Mr CHANDLER: Well, I will go back to the original questioning. Can you explain how you will achieve some of the goals in relation to environment sustainability with recent announcements about securing two gas-fired generators to provide capacity for the next eight years? How does this demonstrate your government's stated commitment to renewables? Is your government not addicted to popular spin but have no real plan to tackle climate change or commitment to renewable energy?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, there might be some there related to climate change.

Mr CHANDLER: I only mentioned climate change. I can remove the term 'climate change'.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of Power and Water, they are questions that should have been asked of the Minister for Power and Water, or it can be tomorrow.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have a Government Owned Corporations Scrutiny Committee that comes in tomorrow. We actually have extra time for the scrutiny committee than last year, we have three hours for Power and Water, the Power and Water Chairman and the CEO come in, and so that is where questions for power and water belong.

Mr CHANDLER: Actually, the next question does relate to Power and Water, and perhaps I could (inaudible), but it does talk about sustainable, and it basically talks about how different government departments state they intend to achieve certain targets.

A member: Climate change.

Mr CHANDLER: No, not climate change targets, I have not said it yet. And yet, in this case here, we have a department that has stepped in and put in place old technology, taking up capacity for generation for the next eight years, as the minister in charge of the Environment, how do you now attract private companies to invest in renewable energy here in the Northern Territory if there is no capacity?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am not sure what you are trying to get at. Obviously, there have been questions this week to all particular ministers in terms of those issues related to their portfolios and agencies, in terms of what they are doing, their efforts are, to meeting some of our climate change targets and actions in terms of energy, renewable energy targets, so I am not sure ...

Mr CHANDLER: My question, perhaps is, as the minister for a sustainable future for our environment, for climate change, we all have these aspirational goals about heading down the renewable track, but if you have got another department, such as Power and Water, and I know they are a business enterprise, but they are investing in older technology and taking up any capacity in the future, how do you as the minister then attract another company to come in here and perhaps invest in renewable energy when there is no market for it?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, once again, I think it is a different output group area that you are talking about in terms of climate change, and I am happy to talk about then, and in relation to each individual agency, there have been questions directed to ministers about what they are doing.

Mr CHANDLER: And I appreciate that.

Mr HAMPTON: I, as the Environment minister, cannot speak for what those individual agencies are doing.

Mr CHANDLER: And I am not asking you to speak on their behalf, I am asking you here.

Mr HAMPTON: I think it is something that I can talk about in the climate change output group, unless you do not have any further questions in terms of environment and sustainability.

Mr CHANDLER: No, I am happy to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, do you have any questions to Output 4.1, Environment and Sustainability?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: In that case, that concludes consideration of Environment and Sustainability.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – HERITAGE
Output 5.1- Heritage Conservation

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move on to Output 5.0 Heritage, 5.1 Heritage Conservation.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, how can you suggest this government cares about our heritage when we see reduced budgets, unkempt monuments and a lack of a real plan to deal with much of the Territory's history?

Mr WOOD: That is a broad question.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, in terms of heritage, there is certainly a lot of fantastic highlights that I can certainly be happy to say in Estimates here. I

In 2009-10, we have provided \$375 000 to support community-based heritage initiatives, including \$200 000 for the annual Heritage Grants Program to assist private owners of heritage places, and \$120 000 for annual grants to the National Trust of the Northern Territory, again, a highlight of the budget in 2009-10. We also continue to implement the government's Heritage 2010 initiative, which provides \$1m per annum for repairs and maintenance of publicly-owned heritage properties. In Budget 2010-11, we have got \$375 000 to support community-based heritage initiatives, again including \$200 000 for the annual Heritage Grants Program to assist owners of heritage places, and \$120 000 for the annual grants of the National Trust of the Northern Territory.

Member for Brennan, we continue to implement the government's Heritage 2010 initiative, which provides \$1m per annum for repairs and maintenance of publicly-owned heritage properties. So I think, in terms of those, what we need to also remember is that we do attract some external funding, and this was received in 2009-10. That was \$737 for the Hermannsburg historic precinct, and \$46 000 for the historic shipwrecks programs. There is also a carry over of historic shipwrecks external program funding from 2008-09 to 2009-10 of \$2000, and a division budget realignment as well as reprioritisation. So, member for Brennan, I think this government has a fantastic record when it comes to our heritage and preserving it.

Mr CHANDLER: I did have quite a few questions on Heritage but I will just ask one last question before the member for Nelson would like to ask a question.

Minister, can you advise if the old Catalina flying boat ramp at East Arm will be given any protection or listed as a Heritage site and, if not, why not given its World War II importance?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I am happy to get Mr Darcey to answer that.

Mr DARCEY: Unfortunately I am unable to answer that question. I am happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice 8.13

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you mind repeating the question for Hansard?

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, can you advise if the old Catalina flying boat ramp at East Arm will be given any protection or listed as a heritage site?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is question No 8.13.

Mr WOOD: Where is the *Heritage Conservation Act*?

Mr HAMPTON: Very good question, member for Nelson, you have been around for a long time haven't you? It has been around that I am aware of since 2002, that is the review of the *Heritage Conservation Act*. There has been a lot of public consultation on that process. There was a draft bill released for public comment in February this year, which closed on 19 March this year and as part of that process forums were held in Darwin and Alice Springs. I am aiming to get this one out of the way and table the bill for a new heritage act before the end of the year.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. Since 1991 the heritage fund was \$200 000, and a good friend of mine sent me some figures. It is still \$200 000, but if you do some calculations over that period of time it probably should be \$315 000. Why has the department maintained this figure, which is also in your annual report, of \$200 000 to provide assistance to private owners of heritage places year-in-year out without increasing it by at least the CPI.

Mr HAMPTON: Another very good question, member for Nelson. I will certainly take that question on board, I will have to take it on notice, but can I say that we have also ...

Mr WOOD: Do you have to take it on notice because they are the facts, it is \$200 000 per year?

Mr HAMPTON: I will have to take that on board and find out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is a question on notice?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Question on Notice No 8.14

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you please repeat the question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, why has the government not, and I know you cannot claim for 1991, but I will put it in, why has the government since 1991 not changed the amount of money provided for assistance to private owners of heritage places?

Mr HAMPTON: I might just go back to the other one. In terms of this government's commitment I think I have read it out previously, member for Nelson, certainly in terms of government's heritage 2010 initiatives we have provided ...

Mr WOOD: I only asked about the act, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: We have provided \$100 per annum for repairs of and maintenance, but in terms of this current question

Mr WOOD: I have got it on notice, anyway.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No 8.14.

Mr WOOD: I have to ask the last question. I have been trying through the media, through some departments, the foundations of a house on the corner of Lambrick Avenue and the new Johnston Road has been damaged over the last week, I think, and I have not been able to get anyone to go out and identify them. Does the department know whether they are of heritage value, and do they know what they are, before they are destroyed by the new development in Johnston?

Mr DARCEY: Yes, we have had Heritage officers out there to look at the site some time ago.

Mr WOOD: They did not tell me.

Mr DARCEY: Our assessment is that they post date the World War II site at the 17½ Mile, although they are close by. They are probably some type of squatter's shack or ...

Mr WOOD: With tiles on the floor?

Mr DARCEY: ... and our staff assessed that it is not of any particular heritage value.

Mr WOOD: Even pre-World War II?

Mr DARCEY: No post World War II. Probably 1960s or 1970s.

Mr WOOD: Well that is after I was born so it is definitely not heritage then. That is my last question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are now at dinner. That concludes questions to Output 5.0 – Heritage, Output 5.1 – Heritage Conservation. We will after dinner be at Output Group 8.0 – Sport and Recreation, Output 8.1 – Sports Development.

The committee suspended.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – SPORT AND RECREATION
Output 8.1 - Sports Development

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now proceed to Output Group 8.0, Sport and Recreation, Output 8.1, Sports Development. Are there any questions?

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, Output Group Sport and Recreation states: 'Provision of sport and recreation activities for the community, optimising performance opportunities for athletes, and managing sporting fixtures'. So, minister, why do we see, if we go to the sports grants last year in the 2009-10 budget, they were listed at \$8.77m for 2008-09. They were then estimated to go up to last year's output of \$8.83m for 2009-10. But if you look at this year's Budget Paper No 3 for 2010-11, and you see the 2009-10 figure down to \$8.32m, then you want the sports sector to believe you are actually increasing the output to \$8.44m for 2010-11. So minister, you better explain to the sporting community your sleight of hand on the budget over the past two years. Where has that money gone?

Mr HAMPTON: I am happy to clear that up. In terms of those grants, what we did was, there was a carry forward of external funding from 2008-09 into 2009-10 of \$232 000. Then, obviously, there are the external grants as well, the Australian Sports Commission Grant funding in 2009-10 of \$617 000, and that is what has seemed, or perhaps had the effect of what you have pointed out there in terms of the variance of the budgets - basically then, the external funding.

Mr BOHLIN: And that is it? And you could not see those changes pending?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, those changes, this happens every year, member for Drysdale, in terms of us relying on the external funding from the federal government in terms of grants, and especially through the Australian Sports Commission, so it is a regular thing that we face in estimates and questioning of budget and variations.

Mr BOHLIN: So, minister you deliberately went out and put in the 2009-10 budget a beefed up financial figure to make you look good before you went out and released the budget? At least this year, it would appear, maybe it is more honest. Why would you have bulked up the figure and then found yourself short if you did not already have the money in the bank?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I think I have answered it, but I am happy to pass on to Susan Kirkman to answer that in more detail. You seemed to be confused.

Ms KIRMAN: I think it is just a timing issue. It just depends on when we are involved in external funding, particularly forthcoming. We might not have that knowledge at the point when the budget papers are being prepared.

Mr BOHLIN: All right, thank you. It is still personally concerning that if you do not have the money in your hand, how can you count it? It is like counting your chickens before they are hatched, I would have thought, especially when we see various ministers go out and gloat about how much they are spending. You need the money in the bank before you can gloat about it.

So we refer back to optimising performance opportunities for athletes as part of the output of Sport and Recreation. How then is your statement true particularly, for example, your last year's cuts reduced the effective ability of hockey to continue to deliver national squads in dual gender, particularly with the excellence of Desmond Abbott and Heather Langham both performing so well and demonstrating the value of investment in the sector. Minister, can you explain why your budgetary cuts affected hockey so badly, or potentially, so badly?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I am happy to pass it over to Steve Rossingh, Executive Director for Sport and Recreation.

Mr ROSSINGH: I think, member for Drysdale, the issue you are referring to is funding for the NTIS programs. It really falls under Output 8.2 so, depending on what the minister wants to do, we can answer that now or wait until 8.2.

Mr BOHLIN: I would have thought it was part of our sports development that we funded our people properly so, I think it would be a good place to start talking about it. We can go further on later, that is fine. I do not mind if you do not want to sit it there, but we are covering sports development.

Mr HAMPTON: Okay. Happy to wait until the appropriate ...

Mr BOHLIN: No worries, minister. Thank you. How many athletes participated interstate and/or locally as an NT representative?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, member for Drysdale, I am presuming that is also in relation to the Institute of Sport.

Mr BOHLIN: Are we in 8.0 or 8.1?

Mr HAMPTON: We are in 8.0.

Mr BOHLIN: Okay, my mistake then. Let us move on to 8.1.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are in Output 8.1 Sports Development.

Mr HAMPTON: Oh, we are in Output 8.1?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Mr HAMPTON: All right.

Mr BOHLIN: I thought we were. So if we are in 8.1 how many athletes participated interstate and/or locally as NT representatives?

Mr Wood: That is 8.2.

Mr HAMPTON: I get what are you saying, member for Drysdale. I do not have those figures in front of me, but I am happy take that question on notice.

Mr BOHLIN: Could you do so, because we asked that same sort of question last year? I think it is an important question.

Question on Notice No 8.15

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could I have that question repeated, please?

Mr BOHLIN: How many athletes participated interstate and/or locally as an NT representative?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That is question No 8.15.

Mr BOHLIN: I do not have any further questions in 8.1.

Mr WOOD: Minister, where is your sports policy?

Mr HAMPTON: That is a very good question, member for Nelson. We are absolutely committed to improving sport and active recreation to all Territorians, regardless of where you are living. As I said, the sports policy one is a critical component of this government's overall approach and I am keen to get the policy out there as soon as we can. We have had to wait for the Commonwealth government to release their Crawford report and their national sports policy. I think it would have been inappropriate for me to release mine before theirs without knowing the detail of their report. Can I assure that it is in the final stages of being released and we want to do that as soon as we can. That is the reason why it has been delayed.

Mr WOOD: The next question might be on notice. Minister, could you list all your sport and recreation officers in relation to the new shires and could you give us some idea of what that cost is?

Mr HAMPTON: We do provide funding to the shires through the Active Remote Communities grant and regarding the employment of those positions, it is, I suppose, a question for the shires directly.

Mr WOOD: But you are funding them, is that correct?

Mr HAMPTON: That is right. We provide a total grant funding to all the NT shires of \$4.8m. This figure does not include organisations that provide a service NT wide, as well as the shires. That is (inaudible).

Mr WOOD: So they are not employed by you then?

Mr HAMPTON: No, they are employed by the shires.

Mr WOOD: All right, I will move on. One other one is, I believe the prisoners being involved in the umpiring of AFL in Alice Springs has been a great success. Has your department had anything to do with that program?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, I have been down to the footy in Alice and seen the umpires in action and I believe one of them has actually been promoted to the A grade as a field umpire. They do a fantastic job and I hear from the prison officers as well that it has had some benefits in prisoner management.

Mr WOOD: He got quicker into A grade than I have.

Mr HAMPTON: But in terms of my office, we have had no involvement. It has been an initiative from the Corrections and the AFL CA.

Mr WOOD: All right, thank you. That is it.

Mr TOLLNER: I have a question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fong Lim.

Mr TOLLNER: Thank you. Can you provide me a list of all sporting groups, clubs, associations, bodies that have received grants in the last 10 years, detailing what those grants have been for, whether they were reviews, junior development, elite athletes, or whatever. Can you get that on a spreadsheet? You might want to take it on notice.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I will have to take that on notice.

Mr TOLLNER: Yes.

Mr HAMPTON: We can provide that.

Question on Notice No 8.16

Mr TOLLNER: What I am chasing is a breakdown of grants or funding that has been given to all sporting bodies, whether they be peak bodies, clubs, associations and the like; the amounts of those grants; what they have been for; for the last two years.

Mr Wood: Two years.

Mr TOLLNER: Two years, yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: You said 10 originally, member for Fong Lim.

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, I did not mean 10, the last two years. Ten! I do not want to send them off to the archives.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, member for Fong Lim. For Hansard, that is question No 8.16.

Mr TOLLNER: No worries. Can you give me an idea which peak sporting bodies have been reviewed by the department over the last two years; the cost of those reviews and table the outcome of those reviews, the reports? For the last two years.

Mr HAMPTON: We are happy to take that on notice, member for Fong Lim. We can provide you with

the details for this financial year, if you would like now.

Mr TOLLNER: Maybe just take it on notice. Just after the last two years, that was for the benefit of Hansard.

Question on Notice No 8.17

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Please repeat the question.

Mr TOLLNER: A list of all peak bodies, actually, I will add a little bit into that if I can, a list of all peak bodies that have received, or have had reviews done on them by the department for the last two years; the cost of those reviews; what those reviews were about; and the reports stemming from those reviews; and also the consultants or body of people that have been engaged to do those reviews. I am very keen to find out which of those sporting bodies requested the department to conduct reviews and which sporting bodies had those reviews foisted on them by the department.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, member for Fong Lim. That is question No 8.17.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That will conclude consideration of Output 8.1.
Output 8.2 - Northern Territory Institute of Sport

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call on questions relating to Output 8.2, Northern Territory Institute of Sport.

Mr BOHLIN: I go back to the question I asked before and your initial statement about optimising performance opportunities for athletes. How have your effective cuts in last year's budget reduced the effective ability of hockey to continue to deliver national squads in dual gender, particularly with the excellence of Desmond Abbott and Heather Langham, both performing so well, demonstrating the value of that investment in hockey? Can you explain those cuts?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, this government has a proud track record of supporting local teams in national competitions. Specifically in hockey, we have the Pearls and the Stingers, and in netball we have the Storm and NT Thunder. We are very proud of our track record in supporting local teams, Territory teams, and international sporting competitions.

In relation to your question, I might give that over to Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: This financial year in support to hockey, we have actually increased support to hockey as a sport. In the last three months, we have provided an additional peak body grant to NT Hockey of \$40 000. That was really in recognition of some funding difficulties and cash flow difficulties they were having. We assessed their situation and recognised there is a new governing committee on board. That governing committee had a very good approach to governance, and gave us a lot of confidence that monies will be spent appropriately and responsibly. As a result, we bolstered their financial position in account of that. That is happening this year. If you look at the data, there has been an increase.

In NTIS funding, the sport has been given ...

Mr BOHLIN: May I interrupt you there? I did not actually go down the line of asking particularly about NTIS funding. You actually dealt very well with the hockey part. I will probably leave it there, other than to point out, obviously, that is a funding increase you have done in only the last three months. I commend you for taking that step. Therefore, one would expect, minister, you must have listened to the concerns that were raised directly with you by hockey about their funding cut, or a nett effect of funding cut, through the NTIS program Towards Hockey. That is, obviously, a good outcome; that you bolstered them back up. However, if you have not made the cuts in the first place, maybe you would

not have needed to do that.

Minister, I know you were approached directly about this so, it is good to see. It is a good outcome.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Drysdale. I have met with the new people within Hockey NT, and we had discussions about the need to look further down the track in a plan for hockey. They need to get back to, I suppose, some of their glory days. Some of the names you mentioned have achieved in the big goal success. We have certainly provided the grant to assist them to pull together a management plan and to help them restructure and benefit hockey players.

Mr BOHLIN: That is a good outcome. Personally, at the current time I do not have any further questions in that particular output due to time restraints.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson? No. That concludes consideration of Output 8.2.

Output 8.3 – Facilities and Events

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We move on to Output 8.3, Facilities and Events. Member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, please explain to the sports clubs, organisations, players, officials, volunteers, umpires - just in case down there - and mums and dads of the NT, what you are doing to insulate them from the significant financial downturn which is incurring in our licensed clubs through the NT this year? The forecast revenue after July 2010 is zero return to foundation membership. Licensed clubs such as The Hub, Cazalys - they all have foundation membership.

Mr HAMPTON: I suppose, they are all private business. In terms of how they run their businesses, their memberships and fundraising activities, that is their own private business. In terms of mums, dads, and Territorians out there, they should have a great deal of confidence in the Territory government with what we have done in terms of providing, not only good sporting events and opportunities for young people to develop and grow and move on to the elite level if they wish, but also in terms of the affordability of being involved in sport through our grant programs.

We provide numerous grants right across the Territory, from Darwin and to the remote regions, through to Alice Springs, so in terms of your question, I am fully confident and satisfied that the Territory government does provide equitable access to sport activities. We have provided support to the Pacific School Games with a grant of \$100 000 previously to help some of those families and athletes be able to take on those championships.

Mr BOHLIN: But, minister, this is your portfolio, right? The viability of hundreds of clubs as a result of this licensed club downturn is real, and under your ministry. Sporting clubs may not be able to financially operate without the major input from licensed clubs. Where do you stand on that matter?

Mr HAMPTON: It is a matter for the clubs and the licensees. I do not see it as a matter for me as the minister for Sport.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, licensed clubs, whose primary existence is to provide a foundation of sporting clubs, right. It currently looks like your government will have a direct tax input loss of around \$4m to \$5m from those sporting clubs, and as a similar direct grant feeds back to sporting clubs themselves they, the sporting clubs, will have a direct nett loss of between \$4m and \$5m-worth of foundation membership grants from those sporting clubs. What are you doing to protect our sporting families from this massive black hole?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, that is a matter for those clubs, those members. They are private organisations. In terms of the minister for Licensing and the Gaming, maybe that is a question you should have asked her.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, it is your portfolio. It will happen to sporting clubs, so it is your responsibility.

What sort of impact do you think the loss of \$4m in direct tax revenue to the government, to the NT government from sporting clubs, will have on our sports? What will the effect be of a direct \$4m less injection into those sporting families, any of our sporting families – speedway, Magpies, netball?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, without harping on it, I think it is a question for the Minister for Racing, Gaming and Licensing. It is a question for those clubs, their board, their members, that needs to be asked of them, not to me as the minister for Sport. My job as the Minister for Sport and Recreation is to oversee in terms of our grants, sports development, facilities and events, that is clearly what my responsibilities are as the minister for Sport, it is not getting involved in the day-to-day running of sporting clubs.

Mr BOHLIN: So, minister, you are quite happy to stand by while clubs may or may not suffer ...

Mr HAMPTON: I am not happy about you putting words into my mouth, you need to listen. What I am saying is, my responsibility as the minister for Sport is clearly to oversee the output groups we have got here, and to make sure that Territorians have access to some of the best facilities, the best events, and that kids throughout the Territory have access to sport. That is clearly my role.

Mr BOHLIN: Good, minister. Have you been made aware of those concerns from the licensed clubs, the foundation membership, that there is likely to be a funding nett loss to sporting clubs throughout the Northern Territory?

Mr HAMPTON: I certainly have not – no.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you. Under National and International Events, there appears to be an estimate of 11 events for this budget. What has happened to our International Cricket matches? I note a \$3m spend in today's newspaper, but I do not see it in the budget highlights. Can you explain both, and where our cricket matches have gone, and also, why would you miss out on a \$3m budget spend? I am sure that \$3m budget spend on sporting grounds would have been a highlight.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, it certainly was and, again, this government is proud of its track record when it comes to attracting big events. We have agreements not only with Cricket Australia people, we have got national agreements with North Queensland Cowboys, the AFL, the WNBL, the NBL and, in terms of the cricket agreement, it is a five-year agreement and obviously the focus is on providing international games. One of the first jobs I have had as the minister for Sport in 2008 was attending the Bangladesh and Australia test at TIO Marrara, which was a fantastic event. In that time the international cricketing fixtures is a moving feast.

There is obviously a lot of political unrest in some of those countries which are part of the Futures Trophy Tournament, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, so talking to Cricket Australia this week, Michael Brown, we are certainly looking at how we can move with the times and take opportunities from the moving feast of international cricket. We are certainly looking at the IPL, looking at the champions' trophy competitions, and we need to get those teams here to Darwin. I am certainly keen to do that and get international cricket to Darwin either through the IPL series or the champions' trophies. It is a complex thing and we know how popular the Australia team is. We have the Ashes series this year which is going to be very hard, we know that. Five day tests are becoming weaker and weaker. We know the success of 20/20 have lost popularity, and that is what driving. We know how popular 20/20 is, just need to look at the big bash series over summer. I am exploring all opportunities, member for Drysdale; certainly the IPL and the champions' trophies are two areas I am keen to get here.

Mr BOHLIN: So you promised to bring the cricket in. At the moment it is going down the left side, maybe a bit behind leg stump.

Mr HAMPTON: Not at all. I would not say putting \$3m into ...

Mr BOHLIN: Where did you get the \$3m from, by the way?

Mr HAMPTON: It is part of our agreement - \$2m from the Territory government, \$1m from Cricket Australia. So I would not say it has gone by the wayside.

Mr BOHLIN: It is not the money. It is not mentioned in the books here particularly, so where did you find \$3m?

Mr HAMPTON: If you go back further it would be in the previous budgets. The money has been given to NT Cricket some time ago.

Mr BOHLIN: It is a re-announcement, thank you. Who pays for the final bills for mowing and cleaning of the TIO Marrara stadium?

Mr HAMPTON: That would be through my agency NRETAS.

Mr BOHLIN: Who pays for the final bills for Power and Water at the TIO Marrara Stadium?

Mr HAMPTON: TIO is owned by the Territory government, so it would be through my department, under the lease we have with AFLNT.

Mr BOHLIN: So, who pays for it?

Mr HAMPTON: It would be AFLNT under that lease with us, as the owners.

Mr BOHLIN: It is or it is not?

Mr HAMPTON: It is the AFLNT.

Mr BOHLIN: You initially said it was not. You initially said you paid for it, so who does actually pay for it?

Mr HAMPTON: We have a lease with AFLNT and they are, as the leaseholders, responsible for that.

Mr BOHLIN: Would you like to take that on notice to make sure you get it accurate, because you have given me two answers.

Mr HAMPTON: I have answered it.

Mr BOHLIN: You have given me two different answers.

Mr HAMPTON: I will give you the right answer. Under the lease AFLNT pay for power and water.

Mr BOHLIN: So that is the correction? No worries. Thank you. With less than about two minutes, would Mr Wood like to ask any questions?

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time constraint is really just at the end of the session, member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: We have plenty to go with the EPA next.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The internal management time is up to you, committee members.

Mr BOHLIN: That is what I am saying; we have the EPA up next.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in relation to the running track at Marrara, has it been replaced? What is the cost of that replacement? And, can you say what was wrong with the previous track, considering it is only about six or seven years old?

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, member for Nelson. In terms of the Arafura Stadium, in February this year we made a commitment of \$4.2m to upgrade Arafura Stadium athletics track. Part of the commitment was to resurface the athletics track, remediate the infield surface and replace irrigation and drainage. Where we are up to to date, I am happy to hand over the Steven Rossingh, but I understand that tender is to be awarded fairly shortly.

Mr ROSSINGH: That is correct, minister. The timeframes are from February there was an eight week design period to issue and then consider and make a decision on tenders, 16 week construction and a pretty firm completion handover date of 22 November this year.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the other part of the question: was there a problem in the construction of that track or why did the old track, which was not that old, have to be replaced? And by the way, is it recyclable? Could be used somewhere else as another track?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, with the old track, there certainly were drainage issues in terms of the original installation and that caused bubbles to appear like Ayers Rock in certain parts of the track, particularly during the wet season, so with the poor drainage previously that was installed it had a big impact on the state of the track. Part of the new remediation works is to fix up the drainage as well. But with regard to it being recyclable, I am not sure. Mr Rossingh might have another answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Nelson, it is not recyclable. No.

Mr WOOD: We cannot take it down to rural athletics at Freds Pass and give it to them?

Mr TOLLNER: I have a question. Some years ago, you might want to inform me about this, I am not sure exactly when, but, I understand that the Rugby League was given a grant of some \$30 000 odd. I am not even sure on the amount, but it was to develop a plan for the development of Richardson Park. I understand that that plan has been completed some time ago. Can you just outline the details of that and can you also outline when government plans to act on those plans that have been developed by the Rugby League here?

Mr HAMPTON: I have met with the Rugby League people previously. We did provide some dollars, member for Fong Lim, for ...

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, when was that? A couple of years ago?

Mr ROSSINGH: It was early last financial year.

Mr HAMPTON: Early last financial year, so, early last year.

Mr TOLLNER: Yes. And?

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of that plan, I am happy to get Mr Rossingh to maybe give a bit more detail on it.

Mr ROSSINGH: The plan that they came up is fairly extensive. It included provision for additional junior grounds. These are the outskirts of the current area; the sealing of the car park; a complete dig-

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up and resurface of the substructure and surface of the playing area; there was additional seating and grandstand and other player amenity things in there as well.

Mr TOLLNER: Does government have any intention of acting on that plan?

Mr HAMPTON: It is something I still need to consider. I have not had a chance to go back and have a look at the plan that Mr Rossingh's talked about in great detail. There have been issues with the organisation itself. I am pretty keen to see that resolved so can I sit down ...

Mr TOLLNER: Obviously this is another issue. This is about the facilities, not the management of the sport.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes.

Mr TOLLNER: But I am just curious as to why early last year government would fork out money, I think it was a significant amount of money, \$30 000 odd, so you would have been expecting a fairly detailed plan where it seems that you have no intention or you have nothing on the books at the moment as to a plan to go ahead with the redevelopment of Richardson Park.

Mr HAMPTON: I want to talk to them. As I said, they have gone through some issues internally in terms of their organisation and I will wait for that to settle down and then I will get to talk to them.

Mr TOLLNER: Obviously you have some views on that plan. You have received a copy of the plan, I take it?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. I have seen it.

Mr TOLLNER: You funded it?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes. I have seen it and I certainly have some views on it. But as I said, I want to wait until they sort out their internal structures within Rugby League. We have supported rugby significantly through the agreement with the North Queensland Cowboys. We are committed to bringing that level of Rugby League to Darwin and next year to Alice Springs. In future development, I think there are some issues regarding the current site. It is an issue that I am aware of where they have been at Richardson Park for a long term. I can understand their passion for being there. However, regarding the growth of the sport, we have just announced money for Palmerston Raiders at Palmerston ...

Mr Chandler: Go Raiders!

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry?

Mr Chandler: Go Raiders!

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, go Raiders! In the growth of the sport, I am taking that into context as well, member for Fong Lim. They are running out of space at Richardson Park and, with the growth of the sport and the best thing for juniors, there are a couple of things I need to consider. But I want to talk to them about that once they re-establish.

Mr TOLLNER: No worries. I only have one more question, and it is a bit of a no-brainer, really. I ask it on behalf of the members for Brennan and Braithling and, probably most importantly, the member for Fong Lim ...

Members interjecting.

Mr TOLLNER: You got that on the public record. Good to see. 'Ever' I think was the term. No, in all seriousness, minister, when can we expect to see the Parramatta Eels up here?

Mr HAMPTON: I would rather see the Canberra Raiders here, member for Fong Lim.

Mr TOLLNER: Actually, in a very serious question, minister, I understand there has been a ban on Cronulla Sharks events being sponsored by government. Is there any truth in that rumour?

Mr HAMPTON: I am certainly not aware of it, member for Fong Lim.

Mr TOLLNER: All right, no worries. That is it from me.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you. That concludes consideration of Output 8.3.

OUTPUT GROUP 9.0 – ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY

Output 9.1 – Environment Protection Authority

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call on questions relating to Output Group 9.0, Environment Protection Authority, Output 9.1, Environment Protection Authority. Sorry, just a moment while we change officers.

Mr HAMPTON: I just thank Mr Rossingh and staff from NTIS, as well, for coming tonight to give assistance.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, on the behalf of the committee, thank you very much for appearing this evening.

Mr TOLLNER: Hey, Karl, I am a little disappointed, mate, I think you could have given a more concrete answer. The next 12 months, 13 months, 14 months, something like that. The rest being six months.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, let us keep moving, thanks. So, Output 9.1, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Again, I reiterate, thank you for the department for providing the answers to the generic questions. I have had a chance to skim through them. I just was not sure, at the start, whether the EPA was covered, but I think it was. Just one question I would like to ask under generics. Can you advise what buildings owned or leased by government for the EPA are not certified?

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, member for Brennan, I might take that on notice.

Mr CHANDLER: Sure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Could you just repeat that question, please?

Mr CHANDLER: Can you advise what buildings owned or leased by government for the EPA are not certified.

Mr HAMPTON: Sorry, Madam Deputy Chair, I will actually hand over to Jacinta Stanford from the EPA.

Ms STANFORD: The only building the EPA occupies is the fifth floor of Harbour View Plaza. It is my understanding that the fifth floor is outside of the current Certificate of Occupancy. The rest of the building is certified.

Mr CHANDLER: I am asking your opinion in this question. How much do you think we need to spend

on an EPA?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, member for Brennan, that is like how long is a piece of string, really, is it not? What I can say is that this government is the one that created the EPA. They have their own *Environmental Protection Authority Act*. We have provided a great deal of funding to them and, in this budget, we have announced extra funding for them to meet their extra responsibilities through legislation amendments we provided this year. I am fully satisfied the current level of funding matches the current level of responsibility within the act.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. The second question. Budget Paper No 1, page 12, states a \$500 000 funding boost for the EPA. However, I can only identify an additional \$434 000. Can you explain the difference, please?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I might give that one to Susan Kirkman.

Ms KIRKMAN: There was new funding of \$500 000, but there was also a carry forward from 2008-09 into 2009-10 of \$65 000 and a \$1000 adjustment for promos and CPI.

Mr CHANDLER: Makes sense. Thank you. Minister, given the public statement by the Chief Minister at the Oil and Gas Conference last year, where he openly promoted that he had land rights in hand, and that there were no environmental third party issues in the Northern Territory, does this not undermine the independence of the EPA in your opinion?

Mr HAMPTON: As I said, this government are the ones that created the EPA. This government has provided it with extra teeth through legislative amendments this year. So I think the Chief Minister and government's record and our position on the EPA is fairly and squarely there in the public arena. We have, as I said, provided extra dollars in this budget - \$500 000 to enable them to undertake their legislative responsibilities, and the extra teeth that we have provided for them in the changes to their act this year. So, in terms of our record and in terms of our position of the EPA, it is there on the public record.

Mr CHANDLER: I appreciate there have been some recent improvements in what the EPA can do, extra responsibilities and so forth, but I worry that, if we have got a Chief Minister that goes out and openly publicly says to, you know, in particular, the oil and gas industry, that there are no third party environmental issues in the NT, in my mind, that certainly undermines what the EPA is there for, and that is to protect our environment. If you have got a Chief Minister that is saying this, 'it is okay to come to the Territory, we have got no environmental concerns, they are all in my back pocket'. That is what it says to me, and I worry that that is the message that gets sent out there, and with recent events that have occurred in our environment, from pollution, for instance, it certainly underpins the Chief Minister's, perhaps his line, or his real intent when it comes to protecting our environment.

Mr HAMPTON: Oh, look, member for Drysdale, our real intent, I think, is out there. As I said, we have got the track record. We are the ones that created the EPA. We are the ones that have given it powers within its own act, and if you want to get caught up in what the Chief Minister said, then maybe, I have been really concerned about some of the things you have said about the EPA, you know, just with your motion in parliament in the last sittings, to direct them to undertake an investigation, which they have already done, that was commissioned by this government and that the EPA had done, in terms of a review of the *Environmental Assessment Act*, in terms of investigating incidences in the harbour.

You have also been out there publicly, directing the EPA to do work, that really does ...

Mr CHANDLER: Just a question.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, it really does go back to their independence, and I do not really think you understand their independence. I am worried that, if you were ever to become the Environment

minister, then we would see a weakening of their powers and their act and their independence. For you, member for Brennan, to say that you are worried about what the Chief Minister says, well, our record is there. Let us have a look at what you have been saying. You have been calling them lazy, you have been challenging their independence ...

Mr CHANDLER: Would you table where I have said the EPA is lazy?

Mr HAMPTON: ... (inaudible)

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order! Order!

Mr HAMPTON: I would be very careful.

Mr CHANDLER: I am asking you to table where you have seen or heard that I have called the EPA lazy. That was your statement, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, I would be very careful about what you have to say about the EPA.

Mr CHANDLER: Where have I ever said the EPA is lazy? That was your statement. We will move on.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is a conversational nature going on here, and let us move forward please, member for Brennan.

Mr HAMPTON: Madam Deputy Chair, we have the member for Drysdale there, sorry.

Mr CHANDLER: No, he is there.

Members interjecting.

Mr Bohlin: Do not blame me for anything, Karl.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, three months after receiving the report, Achieving Ecologically Sustainable Development in the Northern Territory, have you provided feedback to the EPA on perhaps how you will implement the advice and recommendations provided by the EPA?

Mr HAMPTON: Certainly, that has been a great big body of work that the EPA has done, and I would like to acknowledge the board, Dr Andrea Tucker and the rest of the board members. I value their work, again, a great big body of work that has been with me, and it is something that, in terms of recommendations, I am taking on board and will be able to let people know shortly about our response.

Mr CHANDLER: Is there a time frame for that, or just when you get around it?

Mr HAMPTON: No, there is certainly no time frame, member Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, do you consider the EPA suffers a poor public community in the Northern Territory, not so much in what they legislatively mandated to do, but more so from what the average person's perspective of what the agency does, or is supposed to do, and what measures will you be taking to change this?

Mr HAMPTON: The EPA is a new body, there has been calls for them to be have more teeth, and what I have done as the minister to assist that is to provide them, through my main role as a legislator is to provide them with more teeth in terms of the amendments we have provided to the EPA this

year, and in terms of resources to undertake those new powers they have. It is an evolving authority. In terms of the public they seem to want to have an independent watchdog, and I will do the best I can to provide them with the powers and resources to be able to do that.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. I refer to a letter from the Planning Action Network to demonstrate my last question, and to environmental planning in general. The letter says:

The current revelations about pollutions spills at most, if not all our mineral loading facilities in the NT, had been worrying. It is no compensation to say we told you so. When self regulation has proven such a farce at the very least this shows a lack of forward planning and poor management. Recent responses from the government have been like Gilbert and Sullivan, funny if not so serious. We hear the NT government must be the regulator, but fail to regulate. We hear the EPA cannot be the regulator because it needs to remain independent. Minister, as you can see PLAN, a group made up of people who at least care enough about our environment to actually take an interest, and they are confused. So how do you think the average person understands the role of the NT's current EPA?

Mr HAMPTON: I think it is more of a statement, member for Brennan. In terms of us being regulator and incidences as we have seen in the port and the harbour in recent times, again, my role as the minister has been to look at where we can improve the system. I am sure there are people out there in the public who are critical about it; they are passionate about the environment, as I am. I think my role as the minister is, when something is broken, come in and fix it.

I think in our announcements, as the government when these incidences began to occur in our ports, was the right thing to do in undertaking a review of all ports across the Northern Territory; looking at a new licensing regime right across those major activities such as ports and providing resources to my agency to employ six new compliance officers, is the right thing to do. I think the actions of the government has been very fast and appropriate; I have received a lot of positive feedback from people about how government has responded to that in terms of providing extra resources, and we have before parliament doubling of penalties for polluters.

My message is out there, it was a clear message to heavy industry to clean up their act. I want to make sure there is a culture of compliance and disclosure within the heavy industries, and the general population out there who have heard that message would certainly appreciate it.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, I certainly appreciate the model the EPA operates here in the Northern Territory; I appreciate how and what it is trying to achieve. It is more about a perception of what the general public think an EPA delivers. I suppose that can only be given from the world of movies in some cases to see EPA is around the world where investigators come in, flash their badges, and the whole operation is punched in. Perhaps, we do have models interstate that is similar to that.

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I agree. I have met with the Board on numerous occasions now. I might just ask Jacinta Stanford to also provide some commentary from the EPA in terms of what they are doing, and what the wider population say about EPA.

Ms STANFORD: Jacinta Stanford, Acting Executive Director of the EPA. I think it is a really interesting point you have raised, member for Brennan, and it is something that the Board discussed at their last meeting. I do not think I am breaching confidence of that meeting to say we are attempting, this year, to get a broader understanding of what the EPA's role is. We commenced with our presence at the Sustainability Festival, and we will progress that with our presence on the rural show circuit this year so people in the regions are also aware of what we are. The board also resolved to make better use of media releases after board meetings so the public is informed about what issues they are considering and discussing.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Minister, I know I asked this question earlier in another output group. That was in regard to environmental officers who go out and actually check to ensure things are done correctly. We live in this world of self-regulation. What was answered earlier was that we do not have people who go out and monitor samples or whatever, before/after. The average person expects that

we have an environmental watchdog in place.

I know that sits with NRETAS and that the EPA plays a different role. I suppose I am looking for guidance here on how we can - because I am supportive of the EPA; you know I am supportive of the EPA. Have I confused you now? How can we better explain the role of the EPA model we have here in the Northern Territory when most people feel they are the environmental watchdogs? In fact, they are monitoring processes, not the people who are going to walking around in the mud and checking samples and so forth. Whether the government looks at some kind of advertising, some kind of public relations exercise can better explain what the Northern Territory EPA is all about. That was not a question; it is a statement.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: And the minister is entitled to respond to that statement if he wishes.

Mr HAMPTON: That is okay.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, probably you need to demonstrate where some people may also get confused. I read a letter today that was sent to the EPA, where they have chosen not to investigate an alleged leak at the ConocoPhillips LNG plant. You and other ministers, including the Chief Minister, bragged about the EPA being independent and has self-referral ability. What message does this send to the average person if they will not investigate environmental allegations?

Mr HAMPTON: Well, member for Brennan, again, they have self-referral powers. As I said, they are independent body under their own act. I might just get Jacinta to answer that.

Ms STANFORD: Member for Brennan, the initial decision in relation to that particular matter, the EPA has resolved to use its resources effectively. So, we will wait for the government departments responsible for those areas to respond. We will then ask them, as we can under our act, for copies of the reports into those incidents. If the EPA then sees holes, or things that have not been addressed, or public interest issues that have not been picked up on through the government's actions, then we would certainly be taking it on at that point.

To give people an impression that we would take it on and go in there and flash our badges would be dishonest of us. We are the people who let the regulators do their job and, then, we come in afterwards and make sure it has been done properly.

Mr CHANDLER: To go one step further, I actually read today the ConocoPhillips' discharge licence. What concerned me was that, if an allegation is raised that does not fit within the box of the licence application - and this talks about discharges, waste water, monitoring samples that come out of stacks - all of a sudden, we cannot look at it. If it is not the EPA's responsibility, would it fall back to NRETAS? Can the EPA provide that advice back to people that, in this instance, we think you should refer your complaint to NRETAS? Is that a fair process that we could have or ...

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, good question. I will get Mr Grant to answer IT.

Mr GRANT: I have not followed up on that one yet, but definitely it would be NRETAS or Department of Resources would be responsible for that, and there will be a clear delineation. I think in this case, it would be the Department of Resources, but I had better double check that. There is no situation where no one will be responsible.

Mr CHANDLER: All right, thank you. Minister, you have openly said you see the EPA evolve over the years – and you said again tonight that it is an evolving body. Where do you see the EPA 10 years from now? More importantly, what do you see the role evolving into if it is on this road of evolution. In a snapshot 10 years from now, where do you see the EPA?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, again, that is a very broad statement. In 10 years from now ...

Mr CHANDLER: But you must have vision, minister?

Mr HAMPTON: The vision is to maintain their independence. Again, I would be very worried if there was a change of government in terms of the EPA's independence ...

Mr TOLLNER: I think most people would be.

Mr HAMPTON: Well, you have asked the question. As I said, you have been on the public record about what you really think about the EPA, and I would be really concerned. What I would not want to see, for sure, is that independence taken away. I want to see an EPA that is truly independent, an EPA that, if it requires more teeth through legislation, then we provide that as legislators - that is our job. If it needs more resources, obviously, we have a working harbour, industry is growing in the harbour, through the Territory. There is going to be a lot more work put on the EPA. What I would like to see is it grow, along with industry growth in the Territory but, also, maintain its core responsibility; that is being independent. That is what I would like to see but, maybe, it is a good question for Jacinta on behalf of the EPA as well.

Mr CHANDLER: This is your wish list time.

Ms STANFORD: Okay, here we go! The current Board of the EPA are probably the people to make the decisions about the vision of the EPA in the future. They have been fairly forthright about the fact that they see themselves as the environmental watchdog. Given the strategic plan we currently have, that is the direction we will maintain.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you. Thank you for your information, and thank you for candour. Thank you, minister. That is all I have for that output group.

Answers to Questions on Notice Nos 8.1, 8.5, 8.6, 8.9, 8.10, 8.13 and 8.14

Mr HAMPTON: Madam Deputy Chair, I have some of the answers to the questions. For 8.1, 8.6, 8.14, 8.10, 8.9, 8.5 and 8.13.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, minister. Member for Nelson, do you questions on the EPA?

Mr WOOD: No I think we will not fit everything in. Keep going, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thanks, member for Nelson. No questions, member for Fong Lim.

Mr TOLLNER: No, no. Well, I would love to, but I have a few other things.

Can I just ask a query about the next output groups, Madam Deputy Chair? Is it up to us as to who asks questions on a particular area, because there is a range of things there: the ICT, Territory Wildlife Park, which cover different main portfolio areas? Would we be able to get the permission of the Chair to ask questions as they come up?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will just confer with the minister on that in just a moment. Minister, have you a statement to open this area?

Mr HAMPTON: On climate change?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No. If I can just formally open the next session and, then, member for Fong Lim, we will talk through ...

Mr TOLLNER: So we are still on environment are we?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No. We have finished that session. Thank you to all those people who have been involved in that.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CLIMATE CHANGE
Output 1.0 – Policy Advice and Coordination

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are looking at the Output Group, which is Climate Change, Output 1.1, Policy Advice and Coordination.

Sorry, minister, for that delay, but I believe, in following the outputs here, we are now at Climate Change, 1.1, Policy Advice and Coordination.

Mr HAMPTON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair, and I have an opening statement. I would like to introduce Mr Leigh Eldridge from the Energy and Policy and Climate Change Unit with the Department of the Chief Minister, who is here to assist the committee as required. The Northern Territory Climate Change Policy released on 18 December last year includes an initial commitment of \$34m for this truly comprehensive action plan. With 40 targets and 118 actions, the policy takes decisive action in the areas of government leadership, green energy, land management, building green cities and towns, waste, green business and industry, green communities, and living with change.

The Climate Change Policy impacts on all government agencies, and the implementation of the 118 actions involve a number of agencies. My Climate Change portfolio is responsible for the whole-of-government coordination of the Climate Change Policy. I can therefore respond to any areas for which I have responsibility for coordination. A number of actions are the specific responsibility of other ministerial portfolios, however I may be able to offer some explanation to questions. If a detailed answer is required, then I will refer the committee to the appropriate portfolio concerned.

If I could emphasise, the Northern Territory Climate Change Policy is a commitment to real action on real projects that have a positive cost benefit assessment and, quite simply, make good business sense.

Madam Deputy Chair, this concludes my opening statement, and I welcome questions from the committee.

Mr CHANDLER: Minister, the Country Liberals released its very practical Climate Change Pollution Reduction Policy last year, and you and your government criticised it strongly because it was not linked to a carbon pollution reduction scheme, and further, went on to say that, '... a climate change policy must be linked to a national CPRS/ETS or it will fail'. Minister, where does this now leave your own Climate Change Policy, given the Prime Minister has now walked away from, what was it, the greatest moral challenge of our generation - walked away, backflipped on his own CPRS and ETS. How does your policy expect to work, given it was linked, it had to be linked to succeed, how will your policy now work without the national CPRS/ETS? Do we have to wait, as Territorians, until a CPRS is introduced for your policy, or does it sit on the backburner now?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Brennan, in terms of our Climate Change Policy, you know, it is a policy that is there, it is fully costed, unlike yours, and can I say, this government supports the ETS, we still support the ETS, member for Brennan. The ETS is recognised as the least cost most effective climate change measure, and your side, the federal Liberal Party, certainly, along with the CLP's Nigel Scullion in the Senate, blocked the ETS. You are obviously proud of the fact that your side blocked the ETS ...

A member interjecting.

Mr Tollner interjecting.

Mr HAMPTON: He did not care about climate change, and if you did care about climate change, member for Brennan, then you should be ashamed of your federal party colleagues.

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, it is absolutely hypocritical for you and your party to ask about the impact of your side blocking the ETS and about our side's thoughts on the ETS because and how it affects our policy.

Mr Tollner: You guys, we know what you thought.

Mr HAMPTON: Unfortunately, we designed the Northern Territory's climate change policy ...

Mr Tollner interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order, member for Fong Lim.

Mr HAMPTON: ... and it has been designed to be flexible. Whether there is a federal ETS scheme or not, we will continue to push on with our climate change policy.

Mr CHANDLER: Thank you, minister. Unlike your policy, our policy was full of very practical ideas ...

Mr Hampton: Uncosted.

Mr CHANDLER: ... practical ideas that could lead to real savings. It took your government until after Copenhagen to release a climate change policy. In fact, you said that climate change policy, at the time without an ETS was, to use a topical word 'unsustainable'. You are a government that likes to bleat about sustainability; have you costed the Country Liberal's Solar Power Generation Plan for Legislative Assembly, for this building?

Mr HAMPTON: Again, it is your initiative. Why have you not costed it?

Mr CHANDLER: We have costed it. I am asking you the question, minister.

Mr HAMPTON: Clearly, as I said, we have launched that Climate Change Policy last year, fully costed, and it has actions; it has those things we want to see done over the next 20, 30 years. I am happy to maybe get Mr Eldridge to talk about some of those actions and what we are working on.

Mr ELDRIDGE: Lee Eldridge, Energy Policy and Climate Change Unit, DCM. Is the question specifically, member for Brennan, about the costing of the CLP proposal for Parliament House roof?

Mr CHANDLER: Just as one initiative.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry minister. Can I get some clarification from the Chair? The question is from the shadow minister to the minister and whether the departmental person answers it, as I understand, should be in relation to the budget. I cannot see where the relevance is ...

Mr Chandler: This is about costing.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Hold on, no. Not about your costings ...

Members interjecting.

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Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... it is about what is in the budget, member for Brennan. So understand the process and ask your questions appropriately. I ask the Chair to rule on that question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Arafura, you are correct there. Member for Brennan, I just remind you on what we regard as what is relevant: any questions going to the operation and financial positions of the departments and agencies which seek funds in the current budget are relevant. Thank you, member for Brennan.

Mr CHANDLER: Madam Deputy Chair, I was just trying to help the minister out.

Mr HAMPTON: I meant to ask Mr Eldridge to talk about our policy and the \$34m.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Mr Eldridge, you have the call.

Mr CHANDLER: No hang on; the question was about our policy, not the government's policy. So maybe we can just move on in the interest of time.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No. Order! The minister has been asked a question about government policy. He is quite entitled to ...

Mr TOLLNER: Madam Deputy Chair, you made a ruling on the question saying that it was not in order because it was not about the budget. Now, you cannot expect him to answer a question that was not asked. That was ruled out of order.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order, member for Fong Lim! The minister has invited Mr Eldridge to comment on the government policy. Thank you, I have ruled.

Mr TOLLNER: With all due respect, Madam Deputy Chair. This is wrong. You have just ruled the question out of order. You can not expect now an answer given to a question that was not allowed to be asked. That is just ridiculous, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fong Lim!

Mr WOOD: In the interest of time, let it go.

Mr CHANDLER: In the interest of time.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The minister has asked the public servant ...

Mr TOLLNER: Go on, blabber on. Get it out of the way.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Fong Lim, as a matter of courtesy I ask you to please demonstrate some courtesy to the minister and the public servants who are appearing here. Thank you, Mr Eldridge.

Mr ELDERIGE: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

The Chief Minister on 18 December 2009 launched the Territory's Climate Change Policy which has committed \$34m to a plan that involves 40 targets and 118 actions, specifically designed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the key sectors of the economy, the community, and government. The policy will ensure that the Territory plays its part in national and international efforts. There are various elements to it. Of the \$34m, there is a particular breakdown that you might be looking for.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Brennan, further questions?

Mr CHANDLER: No.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you have a Green Energy Task Force that, I think, is due to bring out a report. Can you say when that report is due and will it be made public?

Mr HAMPTON: The Green Energy Task Force's the first report, the six monthly one, will be released by the end of this month. They also hold an annual conference, and that will be held this year in October in Alice Springs. That will be released by the end of the month.

Mr WOOD: I suppose I could ask if you regard nuclear energy as a green energy force?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, I consider a lot of things as alternative energy sources. A very major part of one of our targets is being a leader in renewable energy. We are looking at a lot of different types of renewable energy. We are looking at ...

Mr WOOD: It does not say that. It says green energy. It does not say renewable energy.

Mr HAMPTON: In terms of geothermal, we have gone out to expressions of interest for geothermal exploration, for Alice Springs being a solar city and, wind power and those sorts of things.

Mr WOOD: I did not ask you that to be smart. I do not necessarily think – you may not agree with me - in the debate about energy, just because some parties are politically opposed to it, we should not take it out of the equation for discussion. That is all.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The Labor Party has a uranium policy.

Mr WOOD: That is not nuclear plant, that is just digging it up and giving it to someone else.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Further questions, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: That will do, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: No further questions on climate change?

Mr TOLLNER: No.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I advise members I have received a message from Hansard that members and witnesses need to turn off their phones because when calls are coming through, the phones on silent or vibrating are interfering with Hansard. So, we need mobile phones off, thank you.

Output 3.4 – Information, Communication and Technology Policy

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The next output is Output 3.4, Information Communication and Technology Policy. Member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, of the latest ICT service delivery contracts, how many traineeships are compulsorily attached to the contracts. With the latest ICT service delivery contracts being broken down into eight pieces, how many extra staff will be needed to manage those contracts and delivery standards?

Mr HAMPTON: I presume you are talking about the whole-of-government IT contracts. First of all, I did have an opening remark here.

Mr TOLLNER: I think you have foregone that opportunity, minister.

Mr BOHLIN: It is gone, long gone. The first question has already been taken.

Mr HAMPTON: I am certainly happy to hand over to Mr Graham Symons in relation to that question.

Mr SYMONS: The ICT contract management actually really comes under Mr Knight's portfolio, but a broad answer to the first part of the question – I missed the second part of the question – the numbers of jobs and trainees associated with the new contract model are, in fact, very similar, if not identical, to the current contract model.

Mr BOHLIN: What is that then, sir?

Mr SYMONS: I could not tell you the exact number of trainees at the moment. We can get that for you on notice, though.

Mr BOHLIN: Can I put that question on notice, Madam Deputy Chair?

Question on Notice No 8.19

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, member for Drysdale. You need to repeat that.

Mr BOHLIN: I will put that particular part of the question - in fact, I will put that whole question on notice. Of the latest ICT service delivery contracts, how many traineeships are compulsorily attached to the contracts? With the latest ICT service delivery contracts being broken down into eight pieces, how many extra staff will be needed to manage those contracts and delivery standards?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For *Hansard*, that is question No 8.19.

Mr BOHLIN: Under your government and your watches, minister, you delivered a finance management computer program for all the shires, after they began operating in such a model. Why did you fail to ensure the program was a stable, robust, and purpose appropriate system? Why has it been at the cost of government to have programs rectified, and at what cost? Why was this not covered as a failure of the program delivery company?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Is that appropriate to this Output?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Madam Deputy Chair, can I just say that the IT system with the shires the member for Drysdale is talking about is with Local Government, rather than across government and the whole of government in terms of this output.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, that would be correct, member for Drysdale.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: He needs to address it to the Local Government minister.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you for the table's input, but it is an information and communications and technology issue.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Actually, member for Drysdale, you are talking specifically about an output that refers to another agency, and that is ...

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Mr BOHLIN: So, anything in computer programs, you are not interested? Fair enough, let us keep going.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No actually, it is around broader policy issues.

Mr TOLLNER: That is all right, you get on with your next question.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, what plans do you have for integration and linkage with the NBN for the NT? Now the implementation study is out, you should be able to answer this question well. What plan is beyond the fibre?

Mr HAMPTON: Thanks, member for Drysdale. In terms of the NBN, it is a key election commitment for the Rudd government. In terms of the Northern Territory, I am very pleased to say, member for Drysdale, that we support the NBN. We certainly have lobbied hard over recent years to secure some significant funding.

Regarding the NBN proposal, as we know, it will give speeds of up to 100 Mbps to 90% of Australian premises, utilising the fibre to home technology and speeds of up to 12 Mbps to the remaining 10% of Australian premises.

In the short-term, as I said, we in the Northern Territory did lobby very hard to secure \$75m to be invested into the Northern Territory. As we speak, that fibre is being laid. It is a second competitive backbone fibre through the Northern Territory, up and down the track. As I said, it is being delivered by NextGen Networks. This process has been begun; we have fibre in the ground and being laid as we speak.

In the short term, we have managed to get our bite of the cake in the NBN. We have a second competitive line of fibre being laid through the Northern Territory at the cost of \$75m, investing in more than 200 jobs over the next 18 months.

In the mid to long term, there is \$43bn to be invested nationally over eight years. This will also create jobs that will simulate not only the national economy, but the Northern Territory economy. I am very pleased to say that we have been able to secure this great investment from the NBN.

Mr BOHLIN: Last question. During the last parliamentary sittings, you said you are going to use a backhoe to dig up all Territorians' front yards to implement the NBN fibre to the door. Who bears the cost of trenching those yards, and who is going to fix the yards?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I am quite happy to pass that one over to Mr Graham Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Graham Symons, Chief Executive, Department of Business and Employment. I will pass that one, actually, on to Mr Les Hodgson, who is Executive Director, ICT Policy.

Mr HODGSON: Les Hodgson. The NBN implementation plan came out a little while ago. its recommendations are that it will bear the cost of providing the fibre links to the home – to the premises, right up to the, if you like, front of the house. It will bear the cost with its own cost structures, and recoup that through service charges.

Mr BOHLIN: What about all the damage that the minister's backhoe is going to do? He said it in parliament.

Mr HAMPTON: Mr Hodgson.

Mr HODGSON: The report also indicated that most of the lead-in that goes into homes will not actually be dug into the ground; it will actually come off power poles, as telephone cables currently do.

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So, in effect, it be a minority of driveways they will dig up. Even so, many of those driveways already have existing pipes in them that the fibre would be led through.

Mr BOHLIN: Thank you very much for that. You filled a very good black hole there. It gives me lots of information.

Mr WOOD: Can I go to the EPA?

Mr BOHLIN: I am finished with that output group myself.

Mr TOLLNER: You can ask questions on the ICT.

Mr BOHLIN: I am finished with the ICT, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, any questions on ICT?

Mr WOOD: I am finished with the ITC.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes Output 3.4 – Information, Communication and Technology Policy, and thank you gentlemen for being here this evening.

TERRITORY WILDLIFE PARKS Business Line

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We now move on to Territory Wildlife Parks.

Mr HAMPTON: We will go straight into it, given the time.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mr WOOD: Can the member for Fong Lim go before me, as long as I can come after him? It is a gesture of kindness to a person that has always supported me in parliament.

Mr Tollner: You are a beautiful man, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: I cannot believe I am saying this.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, committee members.

I invite the minister to introduce the accompanying officials, and if he wishes to make an opening statement, which I believe we are not having an opening statement, minister.

We will consider the Estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2010-11 as they relate to the Territory Wildlife Parks, and that is under one business line.

Mr TOLLNER: Minister, I note that on our schedule here, Territory Wildlife Park and Alice Springs Desert Park are listed as business lines. Do you think that is appropriate?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, that is a very good question. Both parks certainly do provide a quality experience to visitors in terms of the services and the product that they do put out. That is how I think of them being in the budget papers as business lines. I certainly do not have any issues with that.

Mr TOLLNER: Minister, have you ever been in business?

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Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, I am not sure what this has to do with the appropriation this output.

Mr TOLLNER: Okay, well let me explain. Revenue in 2009, from Budget 2009-10 Budget Paper No 3 is some \$4.878m for Territory Wildlife Park. From some questions on notice that I asked, figures for 2009, they have received some \$3.957m from Community Service Funding; \$0.798m from park visitor fees, that would total somewhere around \$4.755m. For the end of that year, for that revenue, they had 67 125 visitors, so revenue per visitor basis, they received around \$11.89 per person who has come in the door, and that takes into account that, obviously, there are a lot of schoolchildren coming in at \$10 a head.

Mr Wood: \$10 a head?

Mr TOLLNER: For schoolchildren yes, or children. But in any case, minister, when you boil it all down, you work out what they have received in income from government, what they receive in revenue, government is actually subsidising every visitor to the tune of around \$90 per person, but it seems to be only taking some sort of \$11 back. Minister, if you were running a business, do you think you would be getting a good return if you were having to pay \$90 to every person who walked in your door?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, that is a long question, and in the interests of time, I will get Mr Grant to answer that.

Mr TOLLNER: Sorry, Mr Grant, have you ever run a business?

Mr GRANT: No, I have worked for several, but I can answer the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: If we could return to the ...

Mr TOLLNER: Well, that is the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No it is not. It is a question which seeks an opinion as well, which is not strictly speaking, but the minister has taken the question.

Mr GRANT: The Wildlife Parks are under government business division for various reasons, but I think we are looking at the business model of those parks right now, and that is one of the questions we will be asking ourselves.

Mr TOLLNER: And you will be aware that the Alice Springs Desert Park is in the same situation, around \$80 per visitor at that place that the government subsidises it. You are virtually saying you have to pay everyone \$80 to come there.

Mr GRANT: I think if you look zoos throughout Australia and the world that is not unusual, that government commitment to Taronga Park Zoo, those types of places.

Mr TOLLNER: Okay, there are businesses in Darwin, the most notable, I suppose, is Crocodylus Park ...

Mr Wood: And educational facilities.

Mr TOLLNER: ... that has a range of animals and offers a similar product. Should they be competing ...

A member interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr TOLLNER: Should, for instance, should Crocodylus Park have to compete against a government business that subsidises every single person through the gate to the tune of some \$80-odd dollars.

Mr GRANT: I think Territory Wild Life Park has been there for quite a while, and the Crocodylus Park and Crocosaurus have emerged in the meantime and, again, when we are looking at this model we are looking at how we relate to those businesses.

Mr TOLLNER: Okay. Minister, can you give me an idea as to when you will move on these two businesses?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Fong Lim, as Mr Grant has said, we are going through that process of reviewing both parks as we speak, and as soon as my agency has done that, we will consider it as a government.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I have a concern about it being a GBD but not quite for the same reason. I think the Wildlife Park should exist. I think they should be ...

Mr Tollner: I am not saying it should not.

Mr WOOD: That is right. But, minister, is it the case with, say, Territory Wildlife Park or Alice Springs Wildlife Park for instance, those GBDs cannot go over budget like other departments go over the budget and ask for some money from the Treasury. Is it true that they cannot go over budget?

Mr GRANT: Yes, they have an allocation and they had to stick within it.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but other departments and other parts of the government, they can do that.

Mr GRANT: Their budgets are isolated from ...

Mr WOOD: That is right. Is it true they can only hire vehicles from the fleet and not go out and buy their own vehicles and look after them, so they are stuck with the NT fleet price?

Mr GRANT: They are.

Mr WOOD: It is not good for running a good business.

Mr Tollner: Not good business.

Mr WOOD: How many animal displays have closed down over the last five years?

Mr GRANT: Between both parks?

Mr WOOD: No, I will take the Territory Wildlife Park, the one I know the best. I know the buffaloes are gone, the dingoes are gone, and now the moat has closed down. We are going backwards by the government not actually putting in enough funds to maintain that place?

Mr GRANT: Other displays, member for Nelson, have replaced those and there has been considerable work on other displays and enhancing other displays. Part of what we have been doing to address this problem is moving the Territory Wildlife Park, in particular, to more naturalistic things like the brand new whip ray pool. I do not know if you have seen it, but it is fantastic. It is a big

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investment and very popular, and we have been focusing on naturalistic exhibits rather than the rows of cages in an effort to separate ourselves from the Crocosaurus, Crocodylus-type displays, and create something that is niched differently.

Mr WOOD: Is it also true you have a 3% efficiency dividend?

Mr GRANT: I am not sure it applies in this instance.

Unknown: It does not apply to the Territory Wildlife Park.

Mr WOOD: It does not apply? Because if your budget is stuck and the only alternative, unless you sack people, is to stop maintaining facilities, basically, is the park not going backwards instead of forward? What I know, it looks like it is in need of an injection of funds to make the place look better and if you do not have those dingoes and buffalos, and you have got a train ride which just goes past the bush.

Mr TOLLNER: There are still dingoes there.

Mr WOOD: Yes, they are probably the ones that lived there normally.

Mr GRANT: As I said, what we are trying to do is get new displays and new exhibits to replace some of the tired old ones, and we could take you for a trip and show the new things that are happening, as well as the old ones.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask the minister, is the government going to actually review whether these parks and, as I said, I know the Territory Wildlife Park, I have been around the rural area since the day it started and to some extent you knew how that park was developed and I think the rural people are very proud of it but will you review whether it is a GBD or becomes part of Parks and Wildlife, and operates as, not so much as a GBD, which I think is a waste, because the amount of money you get, you might as well actually ask people to go in for free. Not a lot a money to be collected off the gate, but maybe that is the better way to be. And take the bus down there, by the way, the public bus, and do not be scared of people who say it should not be going down there. There is no reason why our public bus service should not go down there, with the backpackers and all those sorts of people.

Mr Tollner: They do not want to go through all that Deliverance country.

Mr WOOD: Well, some of it is ...

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Nelson, since coming into the portfolio, I have been wary that the Territory Wildlife Park is old, and compared to the Alice Springs Desert Park, where it is a brand new facility, there is certainly a lot of work to be done. That is why we are doing this review really, into both parks, and certainly in terms of what they deliver. I am aware, even with the Desert Park, that there are commercial private tourism operators who have concerns about an un-level football field, if you like, in terms of competition and getting people through the door, and certainly your comments are ...

Mr WOOD: And the public bus goes to Crocodylus Park, right in, so I do not think we should be afraid of taking it to some of the other facilities, and it also serves the rural area with the bus service as well.

Mr BOHLIN: Madam Deputy Chair, I have just one question, if I may?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It is 8 o'clock but, with the indulgence of the minister, will you take the question?

Mr HAMPTON: Yes, I am happy to take one more.

Mr BOHLIN: Minister, thank you very much for that indulgence. What is your explanation for why visitor numbers are continuing to fall across both the Territory Wildlife Park and the Alice Springs Desert Park? Particularly, we saw a high in numbers in 2007-08 for the Territory Wildlife Park, but otherwise, in most months, there seems to be a consistent fall, from 2006 through to today's dates, across both those parks. Perhaps you could bounce it off that same idea – there is no bus service. What is your explanation as to why those numbers keep falling?

Mr HAMPTON: Member for Drysdale, I think there are a number of factors at play here. Obviously, we have gone through the global financial crisis in recent years, in the last twelve months particularly, and I think that has had a significant impact on visitor numbers. As we know, people are tightening their belts, they are not travelling as much as they used to. And I think it also about what sort of experience people are wanting to get from their parks. As Mr Grant said previously in his answer, people coming to the Territory are coming for a different experience, and we have some great parks in the Northern Territory, and in terms of the Territory Wildlife Park, the review is going to look at how we can change the focus and obviously get more people there. I am happy for Mr Grant to maybe elaborate on that answer.

Mr BOHLIN: Your main issues there, the GFC, that these numbers ...

Mr HAMPTON: Well, it is not an excuse, member for Drysdale.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: It was one question, member for Drysdale.

Mr BOHLIN: The numbers were dropping well before then, so perhaps Mr Grant can help.

Mr GRANT: I come from this industry, and I think you will find that, in other states, the wildlife parks on the edges of town, Healesville Sanctuary is a classic, Cleland Wildlife Park in South Australia, and various other ones in other states. The out of town wildlife parks are all not doing well, and I think it is because people these days, they want a big theme park experience, or they want an authentic natural type experience, and these parks, the outer suburban sort of parks, just sort of fit between the two. The visitors are moving towards either going for a really naturalistic experience, or a sort of big fancy experience, and these parks are struggling throughout Australia, so that is what we are doing now, seeing how do we niche that, given that trend. But, as I say, any one of the wildlife parks in the outer areas of any city in Australia are struggling at the moment.

Mr WOOD: We could get some dolphins down there.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr Grant. We are now five minutes over time so, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers who appeared before the committee this evening and provided advice to the minister. Thank you very much.

The committee suspended.
