

The Estimates Committee of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly convened at 8.30 am.

In committee in continuation:

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for your attendance this morning. For the purposes of *Hansard*, on the committee this morning we have the member for Katherine; the member for Grotorex; the Leader of the Opposition; me as Chair, the member for Brennan; the member for Arnhem; the member for Macdonnell; and the member for Brailling.

MINISTER SCRYMGOUR'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr CHAIRMAN: Welcome, minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you, and also invite you, if you wish, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Employment, Education and Training.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am joined at the table by the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, Ms Margaret Banks; Chief Financial Officer, Katrina Harding; Acting Deputy Chief Executive Planning and Resources, John Hassed; Acting Deputy Chief Executive Employment and Training, Kim Jenkinson; Deputy Chief Executive Education Services, Ken Davies; and Executive Director Schools Top End, Kevin Gillan.

In view of the importance of the portfolios of Employment, Education and Training, I will keep my comments brief so as to allow the committee as much time as they need to examine the portfolio.

We are looking at a record commitment of \$719m in the coming year, which is up 51% since 2001. This is clearly indicative of the strong support Labor has always extended to investing in the future of our kids and, indeed, of lifelong learning. As 87% of the portfolio is directed towards education, I will confine these brief remarks to that, but I also look forward to questions on training and employment issues.

I make three points about education under my stewardship and that of this government. First, our general schooling outcomes are equal to or better than national averages. For example, six of the 29 primary schools in Darwin and Palmerston, one more than 2006, equalled or outperformed the Australian metropolitan averages at all levels on reading and numeracy. Twelve more schools have achieved this in at least half of these measures. Territory parents and carers have much to be proud of with respect to their kids' progress benchmarked against the nation.

Second, the 2008-09 Budget is focused on closing the gap in educational outcomes for indigenous students. The *Closing the Gap* funding, mixed with the Australian government commitments, provide a strong foundation on which to deliver the transforming indigenous education package I announced at the last sittings. *Closing the Gap* is the largest social spending program in the Territory's history, and I am gratified as I move around the Territory to get support for *Closing the Gap* from people from all walks of life.

Third, one of the hallmarks of my time as Education minister - and in this I have the full backing of the Henderson government - will be that of maximising of school attendance. The vast majority of parents and carers ensure their kids get to school every day. That goes without saying and is borne out by the results I spoke of before. However, I have no hesitation in doing all I can - from programs of encouragement through to parental responsibility orders - to get all of our kids to school every day.

I now welcome questions from the committee.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Before I invite questions, there are a couple of housekeeping points. Can people please ensure their mobile phones are switched off. Where a question is taken on notice, if someone from the department can make a note of the question number it is assigned, just for ease of collation when they come back.

Leader of the Opposition, do you have questions on the opening statement?

Mr MILLS: Would I assume that generic questions related to the whole operation could be asked now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is really confined to matters raised out of the minister's opening statement. I will allow some latitude and take the lead from the minister, if the minister feels that something was not arising out of that. I was having a look through things and the Treasurer is the only one who deals with the generic things up-front. Everyone else has the catch-all at the end.

Mr MILLS: I will need to be very disciplined and catch it all at the end.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just two questions: \$719m, how much of that is Commonwealth? I just want to know exactly how much the Northern Territory is putting into this for education.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, the Northern Territory government's contribution is quite significant. It has increased since 2001.

Mrs BRAHAM: The way it sounded, though, was that this magnanimous figure did not give recognition to the fact that a lot of it was Commonwealth money. That is what I am asking. How much is Commonwealth money?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, the Northern Territory government's contribution is significant. I will get the breakdown for you. We do not deny that the Australian government does put in a significant contribution to that. No one is denying that. The Northern Territory government's contribution in 2008-09 is just over \$567m. It is \$567 914. That is the Northern Territory government's contribution. The Australian government/external contribution is around \$150m.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, in your opening statement, you also talked about schools reaching national benchmarks. Were you only referring to urban schools?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Unfortunately, member for Braitling, that is an indication. That was part of Transforming Indigenous Education. We have never hidden the fact that we need to do better and we certainly have a lot of work to do in our remote indigenous communities. That is all part of *Closing the Gap* and Transforming Indigenous Education, to get the greater result we need in our remote indigenous communities. Our urban centres, yes, when we look at schools in our provincial, in our urban areas, compared to, say, in metropolitan Victoria, we are on par with those schools. So, the answer to your question is yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: I just wanted to clarify that in your opening statement. It sounds as though the schools across the Territory have reached those benchmarks and there is no differentiation between the remote and the town schools. We will follow that up later.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Braitling. No further questions from the opening statement?

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – EMPLOYMENT

Output 1.1 – Employment Initiatives

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to consider the Estimates of Proposed Expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 as they relate to the Department of Employment, Education and Training. I call on questions relating to Output Group 1.0, Employment, Output 1.1, Employment Initiatives. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. I do not have too many questions in this area. Good morning, minister and crew. Good to see you all. We are all working in the best interests of education in the Territory, so I trust that what occurs today will advance that objective.

Employment initiatives: the member for Nhulunbuy rose in parliament last week to say that the target that was set at the last election is close to achievement. Can you please provide additional details as to the number of commencements and completions since 1995? I understand that you may not have that in your folder but, to do a fair assessment, we need to contrast commencement

with completion going back so that we can see that there is, in fact, an achievement here which is the completion of the training, not the commencement.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This was in relation to Jobs Plan 3. I do not think we can give you the data going back to 1995. I will refer this question to Kim Jenkinson, the Acting Deputy Chief Executive of Employment Services, so he can provide you with as much information you need within that output.

Mr JENKINSON: Mr Mills, the question you asked about completion rates: predominantly, what we have indicated before is that the commencements over the last four years have been increasing and we are reaching that target of 10 000 commencements since 2005. The completion rate is difficult to give you back to 1995 because there has been a range of policy settings which have changed since 1995 at the Australian government level and at the Northern Territory government level, and there has been a range of data collection changes over that time. We can give you information from 2001 through to 2007, except that the 2007 data, at this stage, is not finalised.

What I can say, though, is that the completion rates are not an accurate way of measuring the health of the apprenticeship and traineeship system. That is acknowledged in the most recent NCVET (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) report, *Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics; Apprentices and Trainees*. They acknowledge that the most accurate way of measuring the health of a system is the commencements. That document - which you may or may not have seen, and I have a copy of it here if you wish to see it - shows that the Northern Territory is the second highest jurisdiction with commencement rates at 8%. What we also find around completions is that work done by the Northern Territory Australian Apprenticeship Centre indicated that the main reason for non-completions was firstly moving interstate, and we lose track of those enrolments once they move interstate, or taking out other employment options.

What we do know is that 74.6% of the people who have completed at least one module of training go on to further employment. So, at the moment, the completion rate sits in the Northern Territory at about 50.2%, which is comparable with other jurisdictions. What we have seen is that, between 2005 and 2006, the total completions were 1116, which is a 6% increase on the 2005 completion which was 1048. So we are seeing a trend in total completions rising and we are seeing a trend in total commencements rising.

There are at least two initiatives that we hope will show through in future years. One of them is pre-apprenticeship training in the traditional trades. We know that the traditional trades have increased by 120% in commencements, and they take a hell of a lot longer to come through the system in terms of completions. We are hoping to see that pre-apprenticeship program, which started in 2005, starts to show through 2008-09 in completion rates as well.

I do not believe we can get you an accurate apples versus apples comparison of apprenticeships commencements and completions all the way back to 1995. As I said, the policy settings with the Australian government have changed and we are operating in a national system which is governed by those policy settings.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I appreciate the explanation. However, the factors that bear upon the transference from commencement to completion are consistent. Would they not be consistent? You are not going to have exotic things occur in 2007 which are completely unexpected when you are comparing it, say, with 2005, such as someone starts and they go on to do something different or they go back into education. There are all sorts of factors, but they will be constant.

I need to be able to measure and use, for my own purposes, that measurement between the commencement and the completion. If there are different templates and different measures or different - I cannot quite recall how you described it - say from 1995 onwards, different regimes, I can still compare. I am looking at starting and finishing. So, if it is a different era, I still want to look at what you started and how we ended up. It is like the enterprise of education - you put it in. I still want to know how many come out the other end. That gives me some useful information. I take on board the explanations you have provided, but I still need to see commencements and completions from 1995. I take on board the riders that come with that; it is just raw data. I know enough about what has happened in the past with different federal administrations and different systems here in the Territory, but I can still compare apples with apples which is, in 1995, who started and who finished; 1996 same again, same again.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, with the data and where you are going back to 1995, that data was simply not there or collated. We can give you, as the Acting Chief Executive had said, data from 2001 to 2007. Until 2001, under our government and with Jobs Plan 1, and the changes and restructuring that happened there, that data simply did not exist. Therefore, you wanting to go back to 1995 for data – it is not there.

Mr MILLS: What do you mean 'it does not exist'? That data does not exist in the system?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, it is like a number of things that did not exist.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I am not being churlish, I am just asking: does that data exist or not in the organisation?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, the answer provided to you was quite adequate.

Mr MILLS: With respect, minister, I am not asking for something that is unusual. It is a capacity to actually measure like with like, starts and finishes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, the explanation that was put to you is that, in commencements and completions and all the changes that have happened to date, it has been difficult and brought about a number of changes.

Mr MILLS: I understand. This being estimates and, with respect, I take the explanation that Mr Jenkinson has provided. I understand it. I understand that and I would read this data with that in mind. Nonetheless, with that in mind, and treated with some sensitivity in reference to the different eras and different plans and schemes and so on, I still need to see the raw data so I can make my own judgment on these things. Otherwise, we are just going through an exercise where I can ask for something, an explanation can be given, you can think it is an adequate explanation, and all is done and dusted. It is not satisfactory.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer to Kim Jenkinson, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr JENKINSON: Thank you, minister. We can categorically provide you with data from 2001 to 2008, with 2008 being an incomplete dataset ...

Mr MILLS: I understand that.

Mr JENKINSON: ... and 2007 being an incomplete dataset. We believe we may be able to get some data from 1999. I am not sure of the veracity of the data before 1999. However, a caution, if I may, Mr Mills. If you try to look at the commencements in one year against the completions of that same year, it makes no sense because an apprenticeship can take up to six years to complete. So, unless you are tracking a longitudinal study of a person who commenced in 1995 and when they actually completed in what year, it does not make any sense to compare the commencements with the completions in one year. I just make that caution.

Mr MILLS: I understand that perfectly.

Mr JENKINSON: I am certainly comfortable to supply data for 2001 to 2008.

Mr MILLS: I am just saying, 'Trust me, I am a politician'. I understand how to read these things. For example, if I am looking at 2001 data, it may be a slash and burn approach where anything that happened before the great Labor Party came to office never existed. I know that I would be looking at 2004-05 to see the fruits of enterprises that were undertaken prior to Labor coming to office. Now, I can work that out. I am not looking at this through a political lens. I am trying to read data so I can make sense of it. I trust that if there is a change of government, that there would be that data which would flow through the system so that we can mark our course and work things out. It is not about politics. It is not about protecting one era over another. It is trying to get it right so that our systems produce results. I just request the data. I accept those cautions. I will read it sensibly. I am not looking through a political lens. I am trying to make sense of our efforts in the Territory. An achievement is not a spend; an achievement is an outcome, a result.

Mr CHAIRMAN: As I understand it, subject to the qualifications you have set, Mr Jenkinson, you are happy to provide that information, minister. If that is going to happen, we should probably

take that on notice so that the information can be provided at a later date and there is a record of it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, can I just qualify, so that is the NCVET report?

Mr JENKINSON: No, minister, it is the information from our DELTA system, which is our apprenticeship and traineeship database, which commenced in 2001. That is why we have that validity of that dataset.

Question on Notice No 4.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: I ask the Leader of the Opposition to restate the question.

Mr MILLS: The question is: a provision of apprenticeship commencements and completions since 1995?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, we will provide that.

Mr CHAIRMAN. Thank you. For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 4.1.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. As a rider to that, I welcome all those cautionary notes to assist me with the reading to be provided along with that data so that I have that in terms of one system to another. I take that on board. Thank you, minister.

My next question on this matter is: can you describe for me the mechanisms in place to match training effort with employment requirements? What do you have there that feeds that core issue, the most important issue in any endeavour in education, about what is the purpose of the training? How do you find out what is required in the marketplace so that training can be most accurately and effectively delivered? What system do you have there? Describe that system, please?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Thank you, minister. Mr Mills, we have a range of mechanisms to be able to match the training effort to what is required in the community and what is required by industry.

The major piece of work that we do each year is the labour market analysis, which takes into account movements of the population, retirements from the workforce, inflows from interstate, and that predicts for us what we require, in a general sense, of the VET qualifications that cross the full spectrum of our recurrent training and apprenticeship training.

In meeting community needs, we have a particular fund called the Flexible Response Fund which works directly with community needs to capture those elements that may not be captured in the labour market analysis. For example, the labour market analysis would not capture economic activity say, in the arts sector, the growth of new businesses, because it is only capturing what is in current workforce. So, the Flexible Response Fund, which is driven by community needs and negotiations with registered training organisations for an employment outcome, is negotiated community by community.

The third element that we use to plug parts of the labour market analysis, which is not comprehensive, is the Occupational Skills Shortages. That work is generated by consultations with industry groups. In fact, we commissioned various industry bodies to gather that information, primarily our training advisory councils, to give us where there may be emerging skills needs that we have not identified through a labour market analysis. That is predominately how we match the purchase of our training to what is required.

I have to say there are two places that do stick out quite dramatically. One of them is in the Arts, Sports and Recreation area. That is because the labour market analysis does not capture enterprise development. There is considerable opportunity in that area, the recreation and arts enterprise development in communities. The other area that the labour market analysis does not

capture or translate to what we purchase is in general education because employability skills and literacy and numeracy that we purchase to go in conjunction with our mainstream training does not necessarily translate to an exact job. So we over-purchase against the labour market analysis in general education which comprises employability skills and literacy and numeracy support for training for various cohorts.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Jenkinson. Minister, I think I can work it out, but can you just elaborate on what you mean by 'the purchase'. It seems like a fairly impersonal approach to education. Are you talking about purchasing training programs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: We operate a purchaser/provider model. So we go out to the marketplace with a spectrum of what we want to buy as per the labour market analysis.

Mr MILLS: Buying training?

Mr JENKINSON: Buying training. So we would say to the marketplace that we want to buy 150 qualifications in automotive in the apprenticeship market. Purchasers would put their bid in, being registered training organisations, to deliver automotive training.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. It causes me to ask then - perhaps it is a philosophical question - that if, therefore, we are speaking in industrial terms, education is the producer of education product and the end is the supply - you are supplying the marketplace. Who is in control of education: the producer or the supplier, minister?

I am trying to find what level of influence and control there is in this whole enterprise from the supplier. The end result is, in fact, supplying a need. If the focus of this effort is on the interests of the producer, which is 'you can all have a jolly good time but you might not be producing the results' because you are actually in the business of supplying something. I want to see what kind of buy-in the supplier has in this. It appears to me that the producer is in control of the product when the product is being supplied to meet a particular need.

Can you describe for me in greater detail what kind of control is placed on this whole enterprise by the supplier, that being the job market?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will transfer to Kim in a minute. However, can I just ask the Chair to clarify, in terms of the outputs, what output group covers where some of the questions border on a philosophical view or explanation from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The Output is 1.1, Employment Initiatives. The questions are around what sets the initiatives. So it is within the output group. However, minister, you are right in saying that these are questions of a philosophical basis. It is open to you to respond to that, to bat it back, or to simply say the question is so loaded with them that there is no point in answering, or to refer to one of your officials. Historically, we try to give some latitude, but that latitude extends to the answers as well as the questions.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I just wanted clarification on that. Now that I have sought your clarification and your wise counsel on that I will refer the question of the Leader of the Opposition to Mr Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Mr Mills, we purchase qualifications from out of training packages which is a national industry-driven system, and the Industry Skills Councils in Australia input into those training packages, as do our Training Advisory Councils. The six we have in the Northern Territory give advice on those training packages. So, we are purchasing qualifications that are driven by industry. We purchase them from a registered training organisation which consults with the end player, being industry, as to what are industry's needs in their qualifications that sit within the training package.

Mr MILLS: If that be the case then, and it takes four or six years to produce the necessary goods for the marketplace - that being the appropriate training - what effort is undertaken right now for the possibility of INPEX coming? What training efforts specifically focused on oil and gas today, bearing in mind that this is a government that said that they were going to have an oil and

gas institute and oil and gas is coming onshore one way or another in increasing measure? What provision is being made today for that arrival which could be in four years time and they will be ready?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, before I refer this question to Mr Kim Jenkinson, under Jobs Plans 3, I can say that in terms of record participation in the VET system, 66 VET and training scholarships were awarded over the last three years; and 280 people are participating in 11 programs in 2007 with the Build Skills initiative. I could go on, Leader of the Opposition. As I said, there are over 9000 participants in VET. We have the highest record participants in that system. We are getting ready. I am glad you recognised that our economy is booming and that will get greater. Our commitment, as I said, is building an education and a workforce for all Territorians. I will refer that question to Mr Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Mr Mills, good question. We went through a process around this with the training for people at the LNG plant. It is a matter of DEET working with the proponents for them to give us what their future needs are in terms of qualifications, when they need them, and how they need them regarding what level and type of qualification. We are already doing some training in the oil and gas area because we support the work of ConocoPhillips at Wickham Point. We have already started talking to INPEX, and we are having further discussions with them about their employment and training needs so that we can put that planning in place with our registered training organisations. One of the things that private companies often hold close to their chest is this information, but I am pleased to say we have commenced some discussions with them.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Just to go back to the minister, you recall your government's announcement on the establishment of an oil and gas institute. Can you advise where that is at?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, can I just ask for clarification on that question, please. Given employment initiatives - if we are on output - I am sorry, you have asked me a question. I am just seeking clarification from the Chair. We are in Output 1.1 which is Employment Initiatives. You have asked me about an oil and gas ...

Mr MILLS: Yes, an employment initiative.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will invite the Leader of the Opposition to explain the link he sees before I make a ruling.

Mr MILLS: I find it surprising I have to explain the link. We are talking about initiatives that will result in employment. Your government recognised oil and gas as an emerging and very important industry and, in response to that, described an oil and gas institute a few years ago. Where is it now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, you were talking about a training institute as opposed to a peak body institute of ...

Mr MILLS: That is all we have really had. I am just wondering. It marries into what Mr Jenkinson has been describing and I thought that could actually add a bit more to this. Is there any more information that can be provided on this government's intention to establish an oil and gas institute which marries into the employment initiatives?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does that clarify it enough for you, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. Leader of the Opposition, in answer to your question, I thought the Acting Deputy Chief Executive of Employment and Training had provided you with the answers regarding the training and employment initiatives under the Wickham Point gas plant, and what had been put in place there, and that should suffice. You are now wanting to ...

Mr MILLS: An answer to a related question, yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... with INPEX, is that right? I am just trying to get some clarification from you with that.

Mr MILLS: Well, put simply, I am talking to the Education minister about employment initiatives. We are talking about oil and gas ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I realise that, but your questions are ...

Mr MILLS: It is not too difficult. Your government made a ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: But you are asking about an institution.

Mr MILLS: That institute related to oil and gas. It is to do with the training effort, the employment initiatives. It is a commitment that this government has made. It is a promise that they described at some stage. I just want to know where it is at. It is not a trick question. Surely, there is someone in the Education department who knows about something that your government said?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With all respect, oil and gas at that level is with the Chief Minister.

Mr MILLS: What do you mean? This is ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If you are talking about a wider ...

Mr MILLS: ... a learning institution for the provision of training for the oil and gas industry.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It has not come ...

Mr MILLS: You are the Education minister and the Deputy Chief Minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With all respect, I do not have that information in terms of the institute. I can take your question on notice and get back to you.

Mr MILLS: That is fine. I am not playing games. Just wanting to know where it is at.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No? Not half.

Mr MILLS: Oh, come on!

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. Can I get you, Leader of the Opposition, to simply restate your question?

A member: Playing party politics.

Mr MILLS: I beg your pardon? Just calm down. This is a simple matter of asking a simple question ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

Question on Notice No 4.2

Mr MILLS: The simple question is: could you please give us an update on Labor Party's announcement on the oil and gas institute? I am sorry it is a sensitive question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Not at all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 4.2.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. When the announcement was made at the commencement of the second term in office for the Labor government - the announcement was that there will be 10 000 apprentices. Then there was a shift to apprenticeships and traineeships. Are you able to divide the global figure that was announced in the House just last week by the member for Nhulunbuy,

can you separate those between apprenticeships and traineeships? How many apprenticeships and how many traineeships have been commenced and how many have been completed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I refer that question to Mr Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Yes, we can make that split, and we will be happy to provide that split to you if you would like that as part of the data that we were going to provide to you before. I have just had an update on that data. We can only provide data back to 1999. We have no data before that.

Mr MILLS: Right.

Mr JENKINSON: That was in relation to the question you asked before.

Mr MILLS: Sure.

Mr JENKINSON: From 1995.

Mr MILLS: Okay.

Mr JENKINSON: We can only provide you with data from 1999 through to 2008. I can give you the splits of apprentices and trainees in that, if that suffices.

Mr MILLS: Yes, thank you. Minister, perhaps to assist here, because that data from 1995 to 1998 is unavailable, I hereby recognise that it came under the watch of the Country Liberal Party, and I personally accept responsibility for that and I will leave that be. I am not interested in this data from a political purpose, okay? It is just data for data's sake. I would be interested, anyway, if I were the minister, if I were, say, Country Liberal Party minister for Education, I would be very interested to know why that is the case, because it is important. Okay? Whether or not it is my own mob or not. Okay? I am just putting it in that even keel so that you have some sense that I am not trying to play games with you on a political basis.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would never have accused you of doing that.

Mr MILLS: Well, you just did, under your breath, a while ago.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think you are genuine ...

Mr MILLS: That is very, very nice, but it is not what you said under your breath a while ago.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can we get back to questions on Output 1.1, please?

Mr MILLS: Yes, certainly. If you are really putting in a prodigious effort to get those numbers up, which is a good thing because the economy is growing, then I am only concerned, and I need to be the advocate from the other side just to ensure that everything is in right balance. I want to check that the effort is not put in to achieve what was promised in the lead-in to the last election. I want to know that there is a genuine effort beyond achieving the goal that you set in the lead-in to a next election. Therefore, to demonstrate that, if you have had that many apprentices and trainees start, and you have acknowledged that almost half of them have not completed - and I understand all the riders that go with it - where have you put out a media release which described the real exercise here; being the completion? Have you put out a media release to say: 'This many apprentices have completed. We started with this many, but this is how many we finished with'? Have you announced that, as the real figure of how many you have completed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question, no, there has never been a media release that has gone out to say that. We are still getting some results, the commencements versus completions, and those people are still in there trying to get them back in. In relation to you saying have we put it out there, no, we have not.

Mr MILLS: Can I ask you then, that when the grand total is achieved, and you all give each other a round of applause, will you also provide the information of how many apprentices have completed their training in that time, and how many trainees have completed their course at the same time, so that we have not just the information provided for presentation purposes to make

the promiser look good, but that you have actually achieved something of lasting benefit to the Territory? It is the result of your efforts. Are you able to provide that information at the same time?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With the commencement and completion? Yes, but bear in mind that, when you talk about the 10 000 target that we said that we would reach, in that time when you make that announcement - and I would have to look at that a bit more in terms of what that means - there will be around 3200 apprentices and trainees in that system at that time of completion. We can look at that.

Mr MILLS: I understand that those who are presently training have not completed, but there are Maths teachers within the department who would be able to extrapolate that information so that you can provide something that is a fair measure of result.

Finally on this, the 50% who do not complete, what efforts are made to track them? Do you know their story?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will transfer this to Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Considerable work is put in place by the Northern Territory Apprenticeship Centre. They have two projects that they do under contract to us. One of them is to meet with apprentices and employers and mediate any disputes that might be going on to try to minimise cancellation. The second is to track where non-completers end up. As I indicated earlier on, the two major sources for non-completion are interstate transfers - and we do not know whether they continue their apprenticeship interstate - or moving to another employment option.

Mr MILLS: You do not know that information?

Mr JENKINSON: We know that that is the second main reason from an employer's perspective and an apprentice's perspective through the work that has been done by the Australian Apprenticeship Centre on our behalf. The second major reason as to why they do not complete a qualification, or their apprenticeship, is because they have alternative employment offers.

You asked me before whether there were any exotic influences that flow through on apprenticeships. There are, and that is tight labour markets and high employment and high wages. That pulls apprentices out of their apprenticeship and into a full paid job at a higher rate. Those exotic influences do flow through and they have not been consistent over all these years.

The last project that the Australian Apprenticeship Centre does under worker schedules is they have a job network provider licence and it is their task to match the cancellations or the non-completers to employers, and they undertake that work as well. As I said to you before, the statistics that come from NCVET indicate that at least 74.6% who have completed at least one module of training have gone on to employment. So the major reasons for non-completion in the Northern Territory are interstate migration and moving into other forms of employment.

Mr MILLS: You said you cannot track those who go interstate and what happens then, but those who stay here and go on to something else, are you able to track them and quantify, measure, describe that story in any detail?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will get Kim to answer part of that question, then I was also going to refer you to the Acting Deputy Chief Executive Planning and Resources, John Hasted, who is also part of the NTSC which is putting together and looking at that work.

Mr MILLS: I do not want to spend too much time on this. It is important to track those who do not complete or only half complete.

Mr JENKINSON: Mr Mills, I cannot give you the names of people who have gone on or where they have gone to. It is collected in a confidential survey between the Australian Apprenticeship Centre and the employer and the non-completing apprentice. They give information in by survey. We cannot get that information from them.

Mr MILLS: Not necessarily their names, but whether your training effort here has resulted in employment there - employment type, training type. I do not want names and addresses, but do you have that kind of data?

Mr JENKINSON: The department does not ...

Mr MILLS: You are training chefs and they are ending up as mechanics?

Mr JENKINSON: No, the department does not hold that sort of data.

Mr MILLS: But do you see it as important information?

Mr JENKINSON: I am not sure what you mean by 'that would be important information'.

Mr MILLS: Well, as I described. You want to know that your effort is doing far more than just allowing the politicians to stand up and say 'we have achieved our target', when you want to know that your effort is producing results X, Y and Z and why?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, we do recognise it as important. Data collection and developing a system like that is very important and that is something we have been working towards, looking at building a system of data collection which informs policy and practice. I think all governments - and it is not just about a system so that politicians can get up and say something - need a system, a central repository system, where you get data so that it can properly inform policy and practice, which I am sure you will agree.

Some data collection, as you would be well aware, is quite expensive. I am not saying that we will not do it, or cannot do it. But it is expensive, particularly trying to track students in that whole system after they leave school, or through a course. I am not saying that we will not do it. I know discussions are happening about this at a national level amongst ministers with MCVTE, the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education, and with MCEETYA. There is recognition that nationally we need to have some sort of centralised tracking system. Kim, did you want to add to that?

Mr JENKINSON: Minister, all I can say is that, at any one time, we can tell you how many apprentices of what type we have in the system. I cannot tell you where they have moved to or from. I can tell you always what qualifications we have purchased and what apprentices we have in the system at any time.

Mr MILLS: Well then, you described the exotic influences such as - and I know from experience, young apprentices start trade X, look across and sees that someone working at McDonalds is earning a lot of money, gets tempted and bolts to McDonalds, and abandons a possible career. That data would help inform policy as to what initiative you provide someone in training, what sort of support, to help them stick with their training? That data is critical to help refine your effort. Can I ask, minister, if we can attend to that because it is much more than being able to say 'we have put in this much effort'. The most important thing is the quality of the outcome and you need that kind of data to be able to inform policy. I do not have any further questions, Mr Chairman, on that line.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, did you want John Hassed to ...

Mr MILLS: In the interests of time, I know the member for Braitling - I appreciate that, Mr Hassed.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thanks, Mr Chairman, I have to go to a media appointment shortly. Just briefly, could you then table, minister, the breakdown of the trade areas the apprentices are in from 2001, the areas that people are entering, and if there are any spikes, so we can get a snapshot of where training is going in the Territory? The federal government announced that they are going to have technical schools. Could you inform us whether you are going to introduce technical schools in the Territory? I know that the VET program is very important.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, we can provide those figures you asked for. With the Australian Technical College and where that is up to, as I understand and I will get that confirmed, we do have one in Northern Territory. There is one. I will refer that to Kim Jenkinson.

Mr JENKINSON: Thank you, minister. We do have an Australian Technical College. It is a former Australian government creation. It has some 63 students in it.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many?

Mr JENKINSON: Sixty-three, at this stage. We are working in negotiations with the Australian Technical College and with the Australian government and various proponents to see where that technical college goes to in 2010.

Mrs BRAHAM: Where is it located now?

Mr JENKINSON: Its headquarters is located in Stuart Park. The students reside within the schools.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you do not have a separate technical college as I envisaged what was proposed? No? You have basically the same set-up now?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, it is like a virtual college, member for Braitling. It is not a ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you envisage that you will eventually have a technical college where students can get skills on-site?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, when you look at our numbers of VET participants and trainees, we do not have the same numbers that they do down south to warrant a technical college to be established. There is discussion, though, at a national level with the Australian Technical Colleges but, in the Northern Territory, that is not being considered at this moment.

Mrs BRAHAM: I thought that would have been a very good initiative to have; to ensure apprentices have the ability to work together, learn together and, so, they form that collegiality; whereas, at the moment, they are scattered throughout the Territory and only ever meet people of their own trade on block training occasionally. I suggest, minister, that you do follow it up. It is a good initiative.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, I will refer part of this question, because it is important, to John Hassed who has been having discussions with the federal government regarding the Australian Technical Colleges. We bear in mind that you do have to race off, but we will try to get that information to you.

Mrs BRAHAM: I will be back.

Mr HASSED: Just briefly. This is just carrying on from what Kim said. As we said, the technical college is a virtual college for students coming out of four to six high schools here. The issue with establishing a technical college delivering training in its own right is the expense. It is extremely expensive in the infrastructure required. That is why Charles Darwin University is the biggest provider by far of trade training in the Northern Territory. They do have the infrastructure at their Casuarina Campus in particular, some down at Alice Springs in butchery and such, and also out at the bakery college. Any move to put in something along those lines by either a private provider or another public provider would actually see our numbers split, and we would end up being potentially threatened with the result of our large training providers falling over.

One of the initiatives that we are currently talking to the Australian government about is looking at introducing some trade training within our schools under a trade training centre in secondary schools initiative. However, that will still require the Level III qualification training being undertaken at Charles Darwin University. The money on offer from the Australian government will not allow infrastructure to be put into a school that will meet industry needs in trade training qualifications.

The situation that we have here is that, whilst our numbers have grown, we still have what we call a thin market. In a number of areas, for a number of qualifications, we have to send apprentices down south because we simply do not have the number to be able to make it a viable option to deliver training up this way.

Mrs BRAHAM: And, might I add, apprentices rather like their little jaunts here and there too.

Mr HASSED: Particularly if they go into interstate, they do.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, they do. Is the Workwear/Workgear Bonus program continuing, and can you give some statistics on how many people have actually received that? Have any of them actually dropped out? Is there a recoverable program or, once it is given, that is it?

Minister, I apologise. I will be back. If you could table that for me, please?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will get those figures for you, member for Braitling. They will certainly be covered. Quickly for you, the Workwear/Workgear Bonus, as you know, is provided to all eligible apprentices. That \$1000 is paid to trade apprentices and \$300 to all other apprentices. Up to July 2005, 1644 Workwear/Workgear Bonuses had been paid to those skill shortage trade apprentices, while another 2830 apprentice trainees have received the \$300 bonus. I can table this part of the information for you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you. I will be back.

Mr MILLS: The new federal government has made an announcement regarding a program to upskill workers, I think the program is called Productivity Places Program, which commenced in April, I believe. Could you indicate how much has been budgeted from the Northern Territory for this program?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, consultations between the Australian government, CDU and my department are progressing to allow the Australian Technical Colleges to finalise an appropriate business model that will look at the wider training sector post-December 2009.

The PPP job seekers, which is what you were just talking about, commenced in April 2008 and that is fully funded and managed by the Australian government. The PPP existing worker program is to commence from 1 July 2008, and requires funding contributions of 50% from the Australian government, 40% from the Northern Territory and 10% from industry. We will direct up to \$375 000 worth of additional funding as the Northern Territory's contribution for a program to leverage a contribution from the Australian government of \$468 750, and those contributions from industry.

Further negotiations between the Northern Territory and Australian government are in progress regarding the future contributions that both the PPP job seeker and existing worker programs play in the Northern Territory context, particularly in relation to *Closing the Gap* and our more remote areas.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister. The \$300 000 or thereabouts that you described, is that the 40% contribution?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Of the total, yes.

Mr MILLS: And is provision made for that in this budget cycle?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Okay. What program is replaced by this program? If an agreement has been reached regarding this, there must have been endeavours of some kind in this area before, so what agreement does this one replace?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it has not been replaced, it has just been redirected. I will refer this to Kim Jenkinson who will provide you with better information.

Mr JENKINSON: The \$375 000 is money that flows through under Jobs Plan 3. It is new money in this year which the Australian government is allowing us to count towards this program. The existing worker program is a program that has at least 45 000 places for apprenticeship funding, and we are intending to direct as much of that \$375 000 of the NT contribution to leverage the Australian government contribution towards apprentices and trainees in the Northern Territory. So it is Jobs Plan 3 money.

Mr MILLS: So it is new money?

Mr JENKINSON: New money.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions on Output 1.1, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1. Minister, I will just indicate, I have been told that there will not be many questions in relation to Output 1.2, so we will have a break at the conclusion of that, if that is suitable.

Output 1.2 – Regulation of Occupational Health and Safety

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to consider Output 1.2, Regulation of Occupational Health and Safety. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. There will not be many questions, but that does depend on the answers. Occupational Health and Safety performs a very important role in the wider community. However, I am interested in the role that OH&S has played in assessing government departments. Could you advise of anything that has been identified as being amiss in government departments with regards to government departments fulfilling OH&S responsibilities; and what departments and what are their shortcomings?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, before I answer that, or refer it to the appropriate officer, for the purposes of *Hansard* I notify you that I have been joined at the table by the Executive Director of NT WorkSafe, Ms Laurene Hull. Leader of the Opposition, in answer to your question, I refer that question to Ms Hull.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister.

Ms HULL: Thank you, Mr Chairman. The member for Blain has asked a question of NT WorkSafe as the regulator for occupational health and safety in the Northern Territory. I make the point that individual agencies have responsibility for the management of their occupational health and safety, as does every employer in the Northern Territory, so my comments are confined to what I know and what is appropriate to impart to you as the regulator.

Northern Territory government agencies are required under the legislation to provide reports to NT WorkSafe as the regulator regarding certain accidents and incidents. Those reports are recorded on our database, as are reports in accordance with every employer in the Northern Territory. The question you asked was, essentially, what difficulties or problems has NT WorkSafe identified in Northern Territory government workplaces?

Mr MILLS: Yes, that is right.

Ms HULL: I do not have before me specific data about particular agencies. I would need to make some research to understand – I would not want to provide you with de-identified data, essentially; I have confidentially provisions in my act. However, I can say to you that, generally, the occupational health and safety issues encountered in Northern Territory government workplaces are no different to those encountered in general industry. So, the range that you would expect to see in, for example, construction or transport undertakings in the Northern Territory government are the same issues that you would see in the private sector.

Of course, our experience is the Northern Territory government takes occupational health and safety very seriously, as do most employers, and their performance is, by its nature, amongst the best in the industries in the Northern Territory.

Mr MILLS: Thank you for the answer. I accept that you do not have the data before you and I do not want to identify people ...

Ms HULL: Good.

Mr MILLS: ... but would not stress-related issues come under OH&S?

Ms HULL: Certainly, there are numbers of compensation claims made regarding allegations of bullying or stress-related claims, and they are captured as general data. There are occasionally, amongst NT government agencies, as there are in the general community, complaints made about

injuries - so, two parts of the business: occupational health and safety and workers compensation - alleging incidences or exposure to hazards as a result of stress. Those are investigated where warranted by NT WorkSafe from time to time.

Mr MILLS: Okay, so, not having the data before you, I, therefore, take the implication that if I were – you are implying that if I were to ask for that declassified, de-identified data, it would be available?

Ms HULL: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Thank you.

Question on Notice No 4.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, would you like to restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*?

Mr MILLS: I request, through the minister, details concerning OH&S issues as they relate to government departments for 2006-07?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 4.3.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Also, I acknowledge that the member for Nelson has joined the committee at table.

Are there any further questions on that output? That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

As indicated we will just break for a couple of minutes and rejoin quite quickly. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, if you have your people back, we might make a start. I remind people again to switch off mobile phones in this room. Thank you very much.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Output 2.1 – Preschool Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider questions on Output 2.0, Government Education, Output 2.1, Preschool Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Mr Chairman, in the past, we have looked at government education as a whole. I am wondering whether the minister could do that, unless, of course ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will seek some clarification. I have sought some sage advice from my own assistants. You are right, a couple of years ago that was the process. But that was changed a couple of years back, Leader of the Opposition, and the catch-all is at the end. That has happened a couple of a years ago, and the practice changed to go to the output line by line, so I am going to stick with that.

Mr MILLS: Okay, no questions on preschool education in the interests of time.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There being no questions on Output 2.1, that concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Primary Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output 2.2, Primary Education. Are there any questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: Mr Chairman, in responses to requests from the schools regarding the EBA, are you providing a single response to primary schools, or is there a tailored response to suit the needs of specific schools? Is it a one-size-fits-all response to primary schools, or is there a tailored response?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Perhaps I could get you to restate the full question. I am not sure the minister heard the first part properly.

Mr MILLS: Okay, I will be more specific. With regards to resourcing, are you responding to primary schools generally, or is it a response to the specific needs of different types of primary school; that is, remote or urban or regional, or is it a one-size-fits-all response?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will endeavour to get you an answer, Leader of the Opposition. I seek further clarification – is this in relation to the EBA, did you say? Is that what you said? I thought I heard the word 'EBA' when you first asked the question.

Mr MILLS: Probably your ears pricked up at that, but that is because it is topical. At this point, there are negotiations with regards to resourcing of primary schools?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In relation to the EBA, and that is with the minister who has primary carriage of that, but that is specifically in terms of wages. With resourcing, there are a number of responses to that. To go through the details you require with that, I will refer this question to the Deputy Chief Executive of Education Services, Mr Ken Davies.

Mr DAVIES: Mr Mills, the response to your question is one that is in relation to resourcing. In relation to the EBA, the EBA is a set of wages' negotiations that are also related to teacher conditions.

In relation to resourcing, the responses across the system are different in the way that we are supporting and working with our schools. So, outside of the EBA context, certainly there is a lot of work going on in the agency at the moment about supporting, particularly through *Closing the Gap*, our very remote schools in particular. That includes additional teachers and school councillors being provided into very remote schools through *Closing the Gap*, and substantial additional classrooms going out into very remote schools as well, through *Closing the Gap*.

So, if it is a resourcing issue related to EBA, and additional resourcing in terms of school context, that is a system responsibility, not an EBA issue *per se*.

Mr MILLS: Resourcing as it feeds into class sizes, the ratio between the number of teachers and the number of students. Is that same measure applied whether it is remote, regional or urban?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Ken Davies.

Mr DAVIES: Mr Mills, in response to resourcing, one example I would use to demonstrate what we are doing in relation to the class size issue, particularly in very remote schools at the moment, is we are in negotiations with the Australian government for around 200 additional teachers which they are allocating to the Northern Territory as part of the emergency response intervention. There are some for the government and non-government sector; they will be coming to us over the next four-year period.

The allocation of those resources into our very remote schools is going to be targeted in specific areas. One of the areas we are targeting is the early childhood area where we are going to provide additional teachers on top of existing staffing formula allocations to support the early childhood area in very remote schools.

Mr MILLS: Thank you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, in terms of staffing allocations and how that is done, I could refer that question to John Hassed if you wanted to go into that.

Mr MILLS: It is not that I do not want to hear from Mr Hassed ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, but if you wanted to. If you are talking about resources ...

Mr MILLS: Yes, I know, I know.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... and you did ask the question about class sizes and staffing and staff of schools. If you want a complete answer and all the information, I am willing to refer the second part of that to Mr John Hassed.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that, and I am mindful that you have made a similar offer and I said no. It is nothing to do with Mr Hassed. It is just that I am wanting to - I will give you a chance later. I am sorry.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I am just trying to offer the Leader of the Opposition a full picture rather than partial picture, so that he is informed.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate it. Now, the 200 additional teachers, minister, over four years. How many have been identified and are ready to go?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Good question, Leader of the Opposition. Out of the 200, we commenced the recruitment and advertising of those positions. The first intake of 19 teachers for all of our remote schools have commenced a 10-week induction and training program. The second recruitment drive will be in Term 3 2008, with training in Term 4 2008 and teachers commencing in Term 1 2009.

The Australian government provided \$98.8m over five years for the recruitment of those 200 teachers.

Mr MILLS: How much did the Territory put in?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am just trying to work this out so that we give you the right information. The Australian government's contribution is \$98.8m and that goes from 2008 to 2012. So that is for the 200 teachers. The Northern Territory's input is the normal staffing contribution.

Mr MILLS: So, you mean the normal staffing contribution - who pays their salary? From where does that come?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The Northern Territory government.

Mr MILLS: What does the \$98.8m pay for?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The \$98.8m is over five years for the 200, and that is to cater for the increases. The Northern Territory government's contribution - is that what you are trying to work ...

Mr MILLS: I thought you just said that the Territory government pays the related costs of these additional teachers. I do not know what you mean by 'the related costs'.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, and I know that you did not want John Hassed to provide you with that information with the first answer ...

Mr MILLS: Well, on this one occasion I will let it go.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, but I will refer that to him so that he can break that down for you separate from the Australian government's contribution.

Mr MILLS: Go, John!

Mr HASSED: There are two actual initiatives here. There is the *Closing the Gap* that involves substantial investment by the Northern Territory government, and the Emergency Response that involves substantial investment by the Australian government. In terms of the investment by the Northern Territory government, I can just roll through some of these if you like. The introduction of additional school counsellors: \$300 000 to see four additional student counsellors introduced into the system; six mobile preschools - there are three new mobile preschools in Central Australia based in Lasseter, Tanami and Barkly servicing two sites each ...

Mr MILLS: Sorry, where I am at is there is \$98.8m being provided which results in, ultimately, 200 additional teachers. The question is how much is the Territory putting in, in relation to those 200 additional teachers? That is the question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, just so that we can answer this, we are not trying to hide it. We are just trying to make sure we get you an answer. Some of those costs would go towards housing and other infrastructure support that ...

Mr MILLS: From the Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: From the Northern Territory government, that would go towards placing that teacher in a remote community. So if you want a global figure, or if you would like, Mr Chairman - if the Leader of the Opposition agrees - what I can do is the housing and other infrastructure costs that are attached to those teachers that we put out in those remote communities, we can get that figure and provide that for you at some stage.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I would value a breakdown of what the Territory is putting in alongside that initiative of 200 additional teachers.

Question on Notice No 4.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will get you to restate the question for *Hansard*, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: The Commonwealth government has given \$98.8m which will result in 200 additional teachers between 2008 and 2012. What is the contribution of the Northern Territory government in relation to the 200 additional teachers over the same period?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 4.4.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Now, those 200 additional teachers, I understand it is over five years, and so you have the curious number now of 19. How is it you started with 19? I would expect it to be something like 25?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When the recruitment started, there was an immediate appropriation for 50 teachers that came in first. That was immediately put through by the new federal government when they came to government in their first sittings. They released the appropriation for the first 50 teachers. When we commenced the recruitment for those first 50, we have put 19 through part of that induction and training to respond, particularly where we are seeing the spike or the increase in school attendance in some of the remote communities. So it is responding immediately to those communities. So, out of the first 50, 19 have come in, and we are working away and training them to get them out.

Mr MILLS: Yes, but why 19? If you have appropriation for 50 and you have begun to advertise, I would expect you would be aiming at 25. Have you had difficulty recruiting?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is part of it, and it is continuous recruitment. I will transfer to the Chief Executive of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, Margaret Banks, to just go through some of that, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms BANKS: Mr Mills, the reason we have not taken on 50 teachers at this point is a recruitment issue, primarily because we have started this process in the midst of a school year. You would be aware that, nationally and internationally, there is a limited number of teachers available. In fact, some states are suffering significant shortages. I believe Western Australia is up to 200 teachers short in their workforce. We have a full cohort of teachers in our schools as part of our regular staffing arrangement. What we were looking for, at this point, were teachers in addition to our normal recruitment program. So, the recruitment strategy of initially getting 19 was a very good start, given that it was mid-year. We have certainly had significant interests in further staff being willing to join as we roll this program out. So, we would expect, at a time of year when teachers are more mobile at the end of the year than mid-year, that we will have further success in our recruitment.

Mr MILLS: Are these teachers on the same pay and conditions as other Territory teachers?

Ms BANKS: Yes. Sorry, can I clarify that? Yes, given the conditions are relative to the conditions to other teachers at that particular school. As you would be aware, there are different incentives, but the basic salary is uniform depending on the level of the teacher.

Mr MILLS: Have they received the same level of training and preparation for their mission as other teachers?

Ms BANKS: We are very pleased to be offering an extensive induction program of 10 weeks that, we believe, will equip teachers who already have teaching qualifications. Many of them have extensive experience within the classroom and are already highly competent teachers. That, on top of that induction program, is very much aimed at working in a remote environment. We have worked in partnership with CDU to put together an extensive program that incorporates teaching of accelerated literacy program, with an emphasis on working with English as a second language, and language and culture, and preparation for working in a remote school environment, because all of these teachers will be working in remote environments.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Ms Banks. So, if they have received 10 weeks of intensive training - and it sounds like very important training - to prepare them for their task, have the other teachers who are already in Territory received equivalent training: 10 weeks of intensive training and preparation for service in remote communities?

Ms BANKS: This is our first opportunity to work to a new model. The department is constantly looking at means to improve the way we do our business. We are all very focused on enhancing the opportunities for all students in the Territory. We know the quality of the teacher in the classroom is the key connect indicator. We have a range of strategies to provide professional development to teachers, both before they start the job and once they are within their jobs. Professional development and opportunities for teachers is an ongoing issue that is extremely important to the department.

This is the first time we have been able to offer a pre-placement induction of this duration. However, all teachers in the Territory are very proud of the level of support and professional development they have received, in an ongoing way, to operate in the classroom. It is also expected that professional development and support is provided from within schools as well. We are also, concurrently with this, building our distance learning service and are looking to ways of further enhancing professional development and training opportunities for teachers and school leavers for those who are in a remote environment to use that means more effectively.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Ms Banks. You said that all teachers are happy with the training and preparation that they receive, those that are currently in the system. However, I put it to you that 10 weeks of intensive and very important training is not provided for those currently serving in remote communities. Is there a plan to provide that training for the teachers who are working remotely? Given that it is recognised as a need for these 19 who have arrived, therefore, it must be a need for those who are currently serving, given the high turnover of teachers who work in our remote communities?

I have here documentation from a teacher who has effectively blown the whistle - and copped some troubles for blowing the whistle - about the level of support and backup he has received from the department working remote. Surely there needs to be a recognition that there is a huge need

for preparation for remote service, not only the 19 who have been flown in and parachuted into the Territory?

Ms BANKS: If I could correct, if I did say that 'teachers were happy', I do not think that was actually my intention. I said that the department provided ongoing professional development because the importance of that is recognised. I also indicated that we are looking for ongoing improvement in the way we do business. We are just commencing, or are halfway through this process, a new way of being able to provide support to teachers going into remote.

One thing that is really important is that one size does not fit all teachers. Our plan is not to provide a sheep-dip approach to putting all teachers through the same program. What I am indicating is that we are seriously looking at how we can best prepare our teachers to go into remote communities. We are looking at this model. We are also looking at distance learning and we are looking at other processes as well.

I absolutely affirm that the department believes that preparing teachers to be able to take up their job is a key priority for us. Some of that will be done in a pre-placement way but, for others, we would customise different processes; so, it is not planned as a uniform approach at this point. We have just started the process and we will evaluate its effectiveness and usefulness before we make some further decisions.

Mr MILLS: I am not sure, in all of that, whether the model that has now been developed to service the needs of these 19 who have arrived is a model that you would see being applied to those who are currently and have served in remote communities. I am unsure of that. Minister, can you clarify whether this model, which you have described as an effective and useful model to prepare these 19, is a model that you would employ to adequately prepare teachers who are working remote?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, when we look at some of the professional development of our existing teacher workforce, separate from the 19, I will get to an overall and broad brush of that. With our existing teacher workforce with professional development, there is the teacher professional learning which involves upgrading formal qualifications, the orientation, literacy and numeracy, student behaviour, wellbeing and special needs, stages of schooling teaching, and there is also development with the principals. The whole-of-agency professional learning, and with teachers' cross-cultural awareness and competency, corporate executive orientation ...

Mr MILLS: Just on that cross-cultural competency, what level of training is provided for teachers who are currently working remote?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The cross-cultural awareness and competency is a standard component within the professional development.

Mr MILLS: How many hours do they get whilst they are out there? Do they come in for it, or does it just happen the first time they go out bush?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer that to Margaret Banks.

Ms BANKS: Mr Mills, initially in their orientation/induction, they have one day of cross-cultural awareness, but it is then expected that on-site further induction happens at the school level and appropriate cultural linguistic professional development happens within the community and by community members. We strongly support appropriate tailoring of professional development and, particularly, relevant cultural understanding, to happen at the local level rather than trying to apply a generic one in Darwin.

Mr MILLS: That generic one, I assume, would include remote teachers and teachers going to remote regional communities. For those going urban, how long is that induction, how many days?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Two hours of the one day, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: I thought we just had one day of cross-cultural work. Now we have two hours.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: What do we have? Two hours of cross-cultural training for all teachers? Those other guys get 10 weeks?

Ms BANKS: If I could just clarify. I would like to correct. We have a two-day induction; two hours of that is the cultural element. With reference to the 10 weeks, the entire 10 weeks is not given over to cultural ...

Mr MILLS: No I accept that. I have had a description of that. But, certainly 10 weeks as opposed to two days and two hours - I am certain it is going to be more than two hours. So I think we would move on there.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will put it in context as well, Leader of the Opposition, that the local content - it is a continuous development when the teacher goes out to these remote communities that, whilst they have the two hours in town, that is carried through in remote communities via the school community to have ongoing cross-cultural awareness out in that community. I do not want you to get the impression that that stops.

Mr MILLS: No, if that argument follows, you could give the same to the 19 who came in though, because they would get it out there onsite.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That will continue and that has been a big component of the 19 as well.

Mr MILLS: Well hang on, you have two hours and two days versus 10 weeks. So the same thing ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, they are going out ...

Mr MILLS: Yes, that would apply equally. So the logic does not match. Anyway, I need to move on.

Minister, during the negotiations with the teachers, how many times have you sat down with the union? How many times have you personally sat down and had a discussion with the teachers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, can I seek the relevance of this question in relation to this output please?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allow the Leader of the Opposition to convince me.

Mr MILLS: Okay, you have already told me that the most important factor in education are the teachers; they make the biggest difference. So, in order to reinforce that and to resolve these issues, I assume, to back that sentiment up, you would have sat down with the teachers? If there is anything to hide here, you would probably bat this away. But I assume you are following through with what you have just said; that you would be sitting down with them and having a talk with them. How many times have you met with the teachers in preparation for their EBA negotiations?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have two things in my mind which I will give you the opportunity to address, Leader of the Opposition. One, the output is Primary Education. If I were to allow this sort of question it would be at the end in the general section. The second is that you are going to the EBA; it is a completely different organisation to that of DEET which runs those negotiations. So, what relevance does that have to the financial operations of the department? I accept that we are talking about teachers, but you are talking about the EBA negotiations.

Mr MILLS: Well, if we are going to follow that, just a while ago we were talking about cross-cultural training. You can talk about dollars there. We are talking about primary education. I presume somewhere around that area there are teachers there, and the teachers have a range of issues. Some of the issues are common. If anyone is interested in education they talk about them. In order to move the issue of education along, we need the teachers and, of course, as the minister for Education, which involves teachers, you have sat down with teachers. How many times?

Mr CHAIRMAN: In relation to a question of how many times the minister directly engaged with teachers about their concerns at a primary level, I will allow that. In terms of what discussions

around EBA negotiations, if I allow it at all, it will be later. Between now and getting to the general questions, I will think more on the link. But the EBA negotiation part of the question, I fear - and I could be wrong - that is not something for the minister. However, in terms of sitting down and talking to primary school teachers about issues that are concerning them and how many meetings you have had, I am happy to allow that part of it.

Mr MILLS: I am not going to go there. I just want to know, does the word 'negotiation' involve talking?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, I will endeavour to answer your questions. In terms of the EBA, I will not go in to any discussions in relation to that.

Like all of us, we do value the hard work that teachers put in. In terms of education outcomes, it not only needs teachers, but also needs communities, parents, and everyone to get the outcomes that we want in literacy and numeracy and better education outcomes for all of our kids, regardless of whether they are in Darwin, Alice Springs, or any of our remote Aboriginal communities.

In all of my visits into these schools, whether they are in Darwin or Alice Springs, or our remote communities, I regularly engage and have discussions with teachers. That could be about conditions and issues that they confront and face in their daily work life, particularly many of the teachers in our remote communities. I visit every school in my electorate on a regular basis like every electorate member does, and have discussions with those teachers to go through the issues that they confront, and compile them and submit them appropriately to the department if it requires further action.

In terms of my dialogue with teachers, yes, that happens on a regular basis. Yes, I visit schools on a regular basis and have discussions with principals, with teachers, and with parents.

In terms of the AEU and their representatives, no, I do not meet with the AEU. DEET certainly meets with the appropriate union representatives on operational matters to do with schools on a fortnightly basis.

Mr MILLS: Can I take from that long answer that you have not met with the representatives of the teachers at this important time?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Are you talking about the Australian Education Union, Leader of the Opposition? I have had one meeting with the AEU. The EBA negotiations and the issues in relation to the EBA are handled by the appropriate minister and that is the minister for OCPE, for Public Employment. I have met with the Australian Education Union.

Mr MILLS: Once.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Once.

Mr MILLS: Minister, the next question relates – oh, middle schooling is a particular category, isn't it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Fine, that will do for me. There are too many other things to talk about.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, I am going to ask about truancy or attendance. You put out a media release. I did check one of the remote communities. I will not say which one because of fear of embarrassment, and they said no, they do not supply daily newspapers to their parents. My point is some of your advertisements are not targeting the people that they should target. I am talking about the kids in remote communities who end up in town, who get lost in town camps. I am talking about kids in remote communities whose parents and families are dysfunctional and they are not attending school. I am talking about how are you going to get these kids to school - and I am not talking about punitive measures or anything like that. How do you see this so-called truancy campaign address the kids we are talking about?

Town kids seem to be fine because they have liaison officers attached to their schools to go and see families which are not sending their kids. However, there is that loose group of kids - and we did find a 12-year-old in a town camp who had never been to school - who are not attending school, whose parents are very hard to tie down. I do not think your campaign of glossy fridge magnets and posters will have any effect on them. Can you give me some nitty-gritty of how you are going to get those kids to school?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, with all respect, the glossies are good. I am glad that you touched on truancy because attendance and the whole issue of truancy is probably one of the most important areas if we are going to improve indigenous education outcomes.

In my Transforming Indigenous Education speech, I talked about when we look at teachers and at communities, we see teachers as being the foot soldiers. As well as all of the measures that we have put in place to try to get the best results for all of our kids in remote communities, I also see the most important foot soldiers in all of this - and they do play a pivotal role - that is, the local members for those electorates. I know ...

Mrs BRAHAM: What? We are the attendance officers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, no, hold on. You have asked me a question, member for Braitling, and I am answering it for you. As well as all of the measures that we have put in place, and the continuous promotion of that, every member of our government - I am not saying that you will get out there or anyone else from the opposition or the Independents - on our side of government is totally committed to turning around the disadvantage and the appalling outcomes that we are seeing in our remote communities. Members such as ...

Mrs BRAHAM: No one is disputing that. No one is ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Hold on, member for Braitling. You asked this

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, allow the minister to answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You asked this and I am answering it. You say ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Get to the point.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am getting to the point. You say that you are committed to stopping truancy. Well, so are we. We get out there and we face this same issue with our communities every single day. I want to get the outcomes. I want to see better outcomes in indigenous kids in our remote communities. If you saw *Four Corners* the other day about the Tiwi Islands, we have a lot of work to do. We are not saying that there is one magic bullet to all of this; it is a complex issue. We, as local members, have a responsibility to also work with our communities, sitting down with our parents and people in the community, and work through to get them to see the importance of getting those kids to school.

The department has a number of initiatives. You might not like the glossy pictures, but I know that they have been well received. People have been putting them up in the remote communities. People are turning around. I know that in Ntaria, in Alice Springs, and also in Maningrida, there has been a huge turnaround with kids going to school; communities and parents are starting to see the importance, and they are getting their kids to school.

Whilst I have said punitive measures will apply - and we are looking at how that system will work through authorised officers and getting those kids to school - it is getting local members talking to our people out there and sitting down with communities. It is also the department continuing their campaign with advertising about truancy. I agree; it is not just remote Aboriginal communities. This is an issue of getting kids from town camps in Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine and Tennant Creek to go to school.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, there used to be a tracking system whereby you could track kids in remote communities moving from school to school. Is that tracking system still in place?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, that tracking system will be completed by the end of 2008. That will track students who are not enrolled in school to try to re-engage them. I know that

when I talked to the principal at Maningrida, she was doing a tracking exercise of kids going from there into the Katherine region. Some of the data that came out of that was actually quite amazing: that a kid from Maningrida could end up in a community such as Ali Curung. We are looking at trying to get that up.

Mrs BRAHAM: Who is actually operating it, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that to Ken Davies, member for Braitling.

Mr DAVIES: Mrs Braham, the tracking system is being developed in the Department of Employment, Education and Training. It is housed in our Remote Schools Policy area. All students in the Northern Territory now have a unique pupil number. The system is allowing us to match all of our student data with individual student data to ensure that we are not duplicating numbers, and where students have not been enrolled in schools, we are now identifying them and tracking them down at the individual family level. To do that, we are working with Family and Children's Services, we are starting to work with police, and we are building a project around re-engaging students in school that we do not actually have on the roll at the moment. That is what we are doing. We are making sure that all of those students that we do have enrolled, where they stop attending, we pick it up and we start to ask why.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, I am pleased to hear that tracking system is going to be completed. At least that is one way we can really know where the kids are. Let us face it, they are as transient as their parents and, sometimes I guess, even their parents would not know where they were. I am just saying to you: please let us get it finished and let us get some sort of feedback on how it is working.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am happy to provide that, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Primary education - talking about Back to School vouchers: will they continue after this financial year? How many have you issued? Are they being utilised within remote communities as well as they are in town schools? What numbers are we talking about?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, that will continue. That has always been our government's commitment. That has been built into the base of DEET's funding and we will continue that. That is just as popular, the uptake – and I do not have those numbers, but we can certainly – here they are.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you table them instead?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: These are my talking points, member for Braitling. A total of 43 203 vouchers were issued at the schools at the commencement of Term 1. They are available to government and non-government schools. The 2009 vouchers will be distributed in Term 4 2008. The uptake is not just in our urban centres, but also in our remote communities, who do utilise those vouchers for school uniforms and books, and other necessities for those kids.

Mrs BRAHAM: Relief teachers: schools are given an allocation for relief teachers. One school has come to me saying that they had spent their money at the second half of last year and still have not been reimbursed. What is the delay in the system that schools are not getting reimbursed for their relief teacher funding?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, so that you get an answer, I will transfer this question to Mr Kevin Gillan.

Mr GILLAN: A relief teacher funding strategy was put into place over the past 12 months because the executive felt that schools were not managing their finances as well as they should in relation to relief teacher funding. Relief teacher reimbursement claims in 2006-07 had reached a level that really exceeded our budget. We needed to do something about that, so changes were implemented to improve the management of the relief teacher expenditure.

For Semester 2 2007, the exceptional circumstances claims received by the department for relief teachers amounted to approximately \$77 000. Previously, they had come in at about \$2.3m, so that was a significant reduction.

At the moment, claims relating to Semester 1 2007 amounted to \$573 000, and all schools are being refunded. At the moment, in relation to the 2006-07 claims, we have a number of claims in relation to emergency issues which we are dealing with on a case-by-case point. We expect they will be resolved some time in the coming months.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, it is not good enough that schools have to carry the cost of employing relief teachers without getting the reimbursement earlier, as we have just heard.

What is your policy on relief teachers? Are schools entitled to call in relief teachers when they are needed? Why can schools not get that reimbursement quickly? It puts additional burden on schools when you do it this way. It is just not good enough

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braiting, schools get this funding up-front, and some of those claims that have been put forward are being assessed. I will transfer that part of your question to the Chief Executive Officer of DEET.

Ms BANKS: The allocation for teacher relief is paid in advance, as part of the school grant, up-front. It is only where an excessive 'in excess' is identified that the school would need to manage that. As Mr Gillan indicated, this year most schools have managed well. There is, I think, a \$77 000 sum all up that is waiting to be reimbursed. I am not aware of any school that is suffering hardship because they have managed their budget accordingly.

Mrs BRAITLING: Minister, do you consider the allocation then that you are giving schools for relief teachers is adequate, if so many of them overspend on that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Margaret Banks.

Ms BANKS: Part of the rationale of executive in changing the process was that previously it was – perhaps ad hoc is an inappropriate comment - but there was no requirement for schools to manage within an allocation or to even plan to manage with that amount. In a situation where, if you just go over, it is automatically refunded, we were having a situation that was causing a budget spiral in that it was an area of the budget that was not being properly controlled.

Our attempt, in the first instance, was to work within that budget. I have also given an undertaking that we would be closely monitoring, as an executive, and building a business case for the fact that amount is not sufficient. So, the process is, step 1, reviewing whether it is sufficient. We had a safety net of continuation of the current practice, which is that if a school did go over that amount that they were allocated, which is about 6.5 days per teacher, that there was a safety net. Some schools have come back. So, it is ongoing monitoring and we will be looking very carefully to see where that allocation fits within school needs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Through you, minister, I suggest that it is not good enough to not give schools the ability to replace teachers who may be away for all sorts of legitimate reasons. I hope that some sort of policy change or budget funding will occur fairly quickly within this new financial year.

Ms BANKS: If I could just clarify that the amount paid to school is a short-term relief. Where there is an extended relief beyond 15 days, then schools have other avenues for that amount to be covered. It is intended for the short term.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am aware of that. Minister, could you also then tell me how many teachers are on worker's compensation for work-related matters? Do we still have those long ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braiting, I do not think you can actually get workers' compensation for non-work-related matters.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is that what I said? Okay. Well, 'work-related matter' is what I have written down here. I am just interested to see how many teachers are actually out on workers' compensation; how far back do they go. Some of the cases, I believe, are quite lengthy and they are not being resolved. How much would it cost - I suppose it is not the department, is it, that pays workers' compensation in the budget?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Through the Chair, I will refer this question to Mr John Hassed.

Mr HASSED: Thank you, minister. In terms of claims, I can go back to 2005-06 and give you statistics in that respect.

Injuries in 2005-06 in schools: there were 249 resulting in 99 claims; the expenditure on workers' compensation in that year for schools was \$3.3m. In 2006-07, there were 257 recorded injuries in schools and 78 claims - a drop in the previous year; \$3.2m paid out in workers' compensation. At the time of preparing this report, for 2007-08, 253 injuries recorded, 69 claims in schools, to date about \$3.4m allocated in workers' compensation. There has been an increase in the 2007-08 year and we expect that to go up due to the commutation of several long-term workers' compensation claims. At the end of the day, we expect the figure for 2007-08 for the expenditure on workers' compensation to be around \$4m.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, could you tell me how many teachers are on long-term - and I would suggest over five years - compensation?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will take that question on notice and get that information for you, member for Braiting.

Question on Notice No 4.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braiting, can you restate the question, please?

Mrs BRAHAM: How many teachers are on long-term workers compensation for over five years?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to take the question on notice, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 4.5.

Mrs BRAHAM: I realise it is a difficult area, workers compensation, minister, but it really does affect a person's life. What measures does the department have, or is it just Work Health, to assist teachers to get back to school even part-time?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I presume the department would play a role, but I will refer this question to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just for consistency as well, member for Braiting, these sorts of questions are non-output specific and should really come at the end. I will allow this for an answer now but it is not really directed at primary education. It is more general than that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, thank you.

Mr HASSED: In terms of those who are on workers' compensation, DCIS is the agency that provides the support, or contracts the support out. They introduce case management where it is required for those on workers' compensation. In our dealings, we provide whatever support is necessary on their return to the workplace, or seek that assistance through DCIS or WorkSafe where necessary.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you for that, and thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, we had some national testing recently. Did all primary schools participate in the testing or was it affected by the AEU strikes - dare I use that word?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is this specifically primary schools?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, primary schools.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As far as I know, every school and every student participated in the national testing. However, if you wanted further information to that, I refer that question to Mr Ken Davies.

Mrs BRAHAM: There were, I believe, some schools which had to delay the testing program.

Mr DAVIES: Mrs Braham, all students who were at school during the testing time and were eligible participated in the national testing program in the Northern Territory. The testing program took place both in our primary school and in our middle schools, given that the new program goes from Years 3, 5 through to 7 and to Year 9.

Mrs BRAHAM: Finally, minister, your estimation of enrolments in primary schools on page 36 indicates that there is some reduction next year. Has your estimation taken into account the fact that the baby bonus babies will now be starting school? Why have you given it a lower estimate? Perhaps you could just tell me why would you estimate that the primary school enrolments would be lower?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is primary school enrolments. Mr Davies.

Mr DAVIES: Mrs Braham, if we are comparing the revised figures in the budget targets with Budget 2008-09, there is no reduction in overall enrolments. We are showing the total enrolments in government education will move from 18 224 students to 18 658, and indigenous enrolments from 8444 to 8626.

Mrs BRAHAM: I was looking at some figures in last year's budget that had been estimated.

Mr DAVIES: There was a shift of students last year in this area with the middle schools. So, moving into the new target, we have some students who have moved out of the primary area into the middle schools structure.

Mrs BRAHAM: Fair enough. Minister, just finally, the trend to private primary schools - is that evident in your figures?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is this primary schools?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That crosses over. If you are talking about primary education or the non-government ...

Mr DAVIES: Non-government sector.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Do you want ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am happy to deal with it later when we get to non-government.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Non-government, member for Braitling. That is in Output Group 3.0 if you want to leave it until then.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is all, Mr Chairman, for now.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions on primary education, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Middle Years Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to Output 2.3, Middle Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. In the interest of time, minister, I am required to focus on the most significant issue at the moment, and that is the suspensions. You would be aware of these same figures - you probably have other figures there in addition. From what we can count with the figures that we have received, is that there have been 278 suspensions this year just at Casuarina and Taminmin. If you look at your Budget Papers 2007-08, there are 11 476 kids in middle schools and senior colleges in the NT. Doing the calculations, that is one in 41. That is just two schools alone. Do you have figures there that reveal how many suspensions there have

been across the other schools from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Palmerston, and the other schools in the Top End? How many suspensions have there been to date, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, I will refer that question to Kevin Gillan.

Mr GILLAN: Leader of the Opposition, overall, the number of suspensions in the period 2007-08 is expected to be less than the period 2006-07 for the whole-of-government schools in the Northern Territory. In relation to the figures that you are asking for, are they in relation to secondary schools or all schools across the Territory?

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is in relation to middle years education only.

Mr MILLS: If we are going to go down the track of you going to describe those in middle school that have been suspended, really, it would be common sense to - and with the okay of the Chair - that we have suspensions from middle schools and high schools. Otherwise, I am going to have to ask the same question again and just add the two together. Surely, it is possible to have, given that middle schools and senior colleges work together?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will leave it to the discretion of the minister if it is easy enough to do.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, we will do a general suspensions across in terms of where we are in the individual outputs. You want global suspension numbers across middle school, secondary, or senior?

Mr MILLS: In the olden days, not so long ago, we had secondary education. How many suspensions in the secondary system?

Mr GILLAN: We are able to provide those figures. We provided those figures for secondary education to the *Northern Territory News* last night.

Mr MILLS: Right. Can I have them presented here so it appears in *Hansard*?

Mr GILLAN: We are able to provide those figures, I believe.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Is that being tabled? Do I understand that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Having worked in education, you look at a suspension and you think deeply about why and what can be done to prevent it. Can you give me your answer as to why there are so many suspensions in our education system for bad behaviour?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, having been a former principal of a school, under the Safe School policy, you have a responsibility to every student in your school. You have a responsibility to ensure that that school has a safe learning environment. I am not telling you anything new; you should know this. Principals have that responsibility. They also have an obligation that if you do have bad behaviour, you deal with it. You also know that suspensions can range from one day to four weeks and, depending on the severity of what that issue is, that that young person will be suspended accordingly. That is an issue principals and teachers deal with every single day. Principals also have to bear in mind that if there is an issue of bad behaviour towards a teacher, they have an obligation to their teaching staff to take action. So, the suspensions in your books are high ...

Mr MILLS: Very high.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If you look at the trend in previous years, the suspensions are actually going down. If you also compare that data to what is happening nationally, we are actually in the lower end of those suspensions. As a former principal, if you had to deal with students with bad behaviour or issues on your premises, I am sure you would have acted accordingly.

Mr MILLS: Absolutely. One suspension was very serious. Can you tell me what is your response to this problem in terms of what does indicate about the state of education and the measures to control and to minimise disruptive behaviour in the schools? What does it tell you

about how we are going as a community? Those sorts of reflections are important. It is not playing a game with numbers, saying 'well, in fact, it is better than last year; violent assaults have only gone up a little'. We have a serious problem.

Minister, let us go to the next stage. What measures are in place to recognise the nature of the problem and to deal with it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am not saying that the problem is not serious, Leader of the Opposition. It is very serious.

Mr MILLS: Well, let us go then to ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You asked the question and when I said that if you look at the data on previous years to this year, yes, the assaults are going down. That can be attributed to a very clear policy in Safe Schools, and also the resources and support being given to principals to ensure the implementation of this policy and the zero tolerance approach taken in schools that this behaviour is not acceptable. You will see the decrease.

I know that you do not like glossies, but I did leave on your desk and others so you can familiarise yourself to the Safe School policy which touches on acceptable behaviour in our schools. It says that what is unacceptable is physical or verbal abuse, sexual assault, intimidation and threats, bullying and harassment, possession and use of weapons, possessing and trafficking an illicit drug, possession or being under the influence of alcohol, possessing or supplying tobacco, stealing, and obscene or offensive acts. Put in that context, if you look at those suspensions, well those behaviours that are unacceptable in a school fall within those categories. As I said, principals will act accordingly.

You talked about the suspension of one student. If you look at a whole school community, there are probably 800 other students in that school and we have to deal with what bad behaviour is all about.

Mr MILLS: What I get from that is that you are telling me that the situation is now better than it was. It is not as bad now as it was before. It is getting better? That is what you are telling me?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, what I am telling you is that our schools are doing a fantastic job.

Mr MILLS: I do not deny that. You have told me it is getting better.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You need to stop talking down our schools and our principals.

Mr MILLS: I am not talking down the schools.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are talking about suspensions. When you put that up against - well, let us look at our schools across the board and their achievements and what they are doing. As I said, on par nationally, we are achieving that. Principals have an obligation and a responsibility to protect their teaching staff and every other student in those schools. If the action that they take, in your books, is too harsh and they should not do that ...

Mr MILLS: That is not the case. I think that principals are taking appropriate measures to reinforce those standards. There should be a zero tolerance approach. What I am surprised at, minister, is you are endeavouring to convince me that the problem is better now than it has been in the past.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, what I was saying is this has probably been an issue right through. It just did not start in 2001, or start this year, or whatever. It has been an issue for a long time in this system. I am saying that the Safe School policy which was implemented last year has provided a sound framework to be able to implement and ensure that we deal with the bad behaviour that is happening in schools.

Mr MILLS: Okay, good.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In addition to those suspensions, Leader of the Opposition - and I know that you do not like hearing this - we also recognise the need for additional support for those students who are experiencing that difficulty, and also special needs. So, offsetting that with where we put in the additional \$1.7m to special needs, to work with students having those difficulties, and the 23 extra school-based counsellors so that we can work with those students. Also, Family and Community Services is to start doing the family capacity work that needs to happen with, hopefully, the outcome of getting those kids back and re-engaging them in the system.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister. Make no mistake; I fully support a zero tolerance approach. I back up the principals in their actions. The standards that have been described in that glossy brochure every sensible person and every good family would understand. It needs to be backed up - no question about that. The next thing is suspensions would automatically follow from enforcing a standard - no problem with that. You need to have a standard and you need to back it up.

If we recognise that a suspension is an action to reinforce and to strengthen the standard within a school, you also have to recognise the effect of a suspension. That is a very difficult issue. I am not saying you should not suspend but, unfortunately, it becomes very complex. I want to know whether you understand the complexity of this, and have put the appropriate resourcing in. There are studies that demonstrate that those who go into suspension are the ones who are challenged most academically, the ones who have troubled backgrounds, and they are the ones who need a special kind of response. So, it is suspension and then what?

Could you please describe for me the sorts of programs that are in place to respond to those who have been suspended? We want to stop that recurring and we are addressing a very deep and serious problem. What measures are in place once they have been suspended? What sort of follow-up, what sort of remediation, what sort of reach into the family is being provided so that we are serious about this?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition supports the zero tolerance ...

Mr MILLS: I always have. I always have and I did when I was in a school.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... and that the Leader of the Opposition has ceased talking schools down and the actions ...

Mr MILLS: Come off it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... with schools. Our government ...

Mr MILLS: Come off it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, you have a gibe at us in terms of what needs to go in. I agree with you ...

Mr MILLS: You are playing around with the numbers. Get on with the serious business.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I say to the Leader of the Opposition that our government is just as committed, if not more. Commitment goes beyond ...

Mr MILLS: Can you talk about the programs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... the commitment goes beyond just rhetoric of the past. We have actually put in ...

Mr MILLS: Yes, all right, commitment is appealing. Tell us what you have done.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We have actually put in the resources. He hates it because it is just ...

Mr MILLS: Describe it. Describe the programs. I do not want all that bull.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, if you ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order! Thank you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Take a sip and a deep breath and listen to the answer.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, please. Leader of the Opposition, please allow the minister to finish her answer.

Mr MILLS: She waffles on. I want the details.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Allow the minister to finish. She has the ability to answer in the way she deems fit, just as I have allowed great latitude from all members in the way they have chosen to ask the questions.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I will endeavour to answer it in a very nice way so as not to provoke the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: Just answering will do.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Let me answer the question. Take a deep breath and listen.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I am waiting for you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are not on the floor of parliament where you think you can beat your chest and sing out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, our government, as I said, enhanced the DEET budget by an additional \$1.7m, including additional positive learning programs. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would know about the positive learning programs in Palmerston and Alice Springs, and an additional Autism Spectrum Disorder learning centre in Palmerston, with funding to enable a range of support for schools for students with high-level behavioural needs. As I understand, the \$1.7m is in addition to the \$2.585m.

In addition to that, we have 11 behavioural advisors who work across the Northern Territory. I have already spoken about the 23 school counsellors, and \$700 000 additional funds in 2008-09 to implement a range of intervention programs - and that is just with DEET. Bear in mind the realignment - and I will go through that when we deal with Family and Community Services - of the department with Children and Families and youths at risk, and that integration with DEET and those programs dealing with those youths outside of the school precinct.

Where some of those students have been suspended, Palmerston is trialling support; that is, further education work is provided to those students in their home. Mr Chairman, the \$1.7m increase in our special needs is a 13% increase from 2007-08.

Mr MILLS: In the interests of time, I have to hold it there.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in relation to middle years?

Mrs BRAHAM: Just on the matter of suspensions - I am referring to a suspension in one of the Alice Springs schools. Minister, what is your policy regarding whether a student on suspension should continue to attend the Clontarf football program? It might sound a little odd, but the Clontarf program is running successfully, and there have been concerns that students who are suspended are allowed to continue to go to the foundation. I am just wondering what your thoughts are on that matter. Should they be suspended - full stop? There needs to be a policy, minister. That is what I am saying ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, I know. I am getting advice. Member for Braitling, in terms of the suspensions and the particular case that you talk about - and I do not know about the individual case that you are talking about in Alice Springs - whatever the student is suspended for, I suppose still being able to continue to access the Clontarf program whilst on suspension would be

something that the school and the individual has worked out, depending on what the suspension is for and at what level. I do not know the details of what you are talking about. What I can do is transfer this question, if it is in relation to, specifically, Alice Springs, to Ms Sue Murphy, Acting Executive Director Central Australia.

Ms MURPHY: One of the basic tenets of the Clontarf Academy is that it works with students to build their self-esteem through Australian Rules Football. The belief is that students who are successful with Australian Rules Football will then go on to have success in a whole other range of aspects of their lives, including their formal education. I can understand that a student who may have been suspended from school would not be denied the support from the Clontarf program to assist those students to help deal with those issues. I am not familiar with the case in particular but, certainly, the Clontarf Foundation is working with the students to build their self-esteem and for students to gain success ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I am aware of what Clontarf is about.

Ms MURPHY: So the thinking would be that, by removing support from the Clontarf Foundation, it is almost like a double whammy for that particular student. I am sure there are opportunities for us to talk of the Clontarf Foundation.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, a suspension is usually for something fairly severe. I am not talking about a case. I am talking about a policy that, perhaps, needs to be addressed and people know. Some of the circumstances surrounding that question leaves people a bit bewildered as to how can the child be suspended but enjoy the fruits of a program? It just does not seem right. Can I leave it with you and we will talk about it later? I just do not believe – if you are on suspension, you are on suspension, full stop.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, I have no problems with having further discussions with you, member for Braitling, on this issue.

Mrs BRAHAM: I would just like to you to make a policy statement about it later. Your middle schools also, you are locating some in communities. Could you tell me what communities they are going to be located in?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, I will transfer this question to Mr Ken Davies.

Mr DAVIES: Mrs Braham, the answer to that is that our schools get an approval to offer a specific education program. For our very remote schools, for example, even our smaller schools out there, most of them have been approved to offer a Transition to Year 9 program which picks up a middle school component. So, there are specific middle schools and, then, when we go into our big regional centres by geo-location, say Maningrida, obviously they are offering a middle school program, and for a smaller school like Willowra, that is approved to offer a T to 9 program, which has in it a middle school program as part of the school operation.

Mrs BRAHAM: That does not seem to be what I understood. I believed there was to be a middle school, for instance, built at Utopia.

Mr DAVIES: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, that is what I am asking. Where are the middle schools?

Mr DAVIES: Yes, okay. This is one that is on the books at the moment. Alparra is a new middle school - \$2m is committed to this in 2008-09 on top of middle schools programs in all schools that have been approved. So, this is a specific middle school structure that is being created at Alparra.

Mrs BRAHAM: And that is to cater for students along the Sandover Highway, including places like Canteen Creek?

Mr DAVIES: It will not go as far as Canteen Creek.

Mrs BRAHAM: Lajamanu? You are also building one there?

Mr DAVIES: Lajamanu has an approved program to offer a program from preschool through to Year 9, and then the Year 10, 11 and 12 program there is supported by the NT Open Education Centre.

Mrs BRAHAM: If we go back to the one at Alparra, the Commonwealth has also said there is to be free boarding schools. Could you tell me where the boarding schools will be located? I presume we saw one the other night on the Tiwi Islands?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, discussions are in the very early stages. We have committed ourselves, with the Australian government, to put in place those residential colleges in those areas. Through Transforming Indigenous Education and what we are doing, and the sites that we will look at, at East Arnhem and certainly the Warlpiri Triangle, will look at those residential colleges. For the 150 places, the Australian government money, \$28.9m, and the Indigenous Land Corporation committed a further \$15m to that. But, at the moment, as I said, discussions are being held as to where these facilities will be located in the Northern Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM: You are saying that you have not decided where they are going to be located?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, the discussions between ourselves and communities and the Australian government is to look at where the preferred location is going to be with all of these sites.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, will the federal government fund these boarding schools for the operation and maintenance and management and the building, or is there a component of NT monies?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Some of that money will come out of *Closing the Gap*.

Mrs BRAHAM: Some of the money will come out of *Closing the Gap*? Do you have an estimate of how much these schools will cost?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, around \$700 000, but I can get further information for you on that.

Mrs BRAHAM: How will you decide where these boarding schools are going to be located? On what criteria?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I said, the links with Transforming Indigenous Education and the Community Education Boards, and the work that we are doing under Transforming Indigenous Education, the discussions with the Commonwealth with communities as to potential locations has commenced. We will make a decision after there has been full consultation.

Mrs BRAHAM: You must have some ideas in mind, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, the East Arnhem region where we are doing one site, the Warlpiri Triangle or around that vicinity is probably another potential site, and certainly the capacity within the Katherine region is probably another area that is being looked at. Or around Wadeye. We know that population growth is happening there and we need to deal with that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does it make sense if you are establishing a middle school at Utopia to also put a boarding school there so that students from outlying areas along that Sandover and, I think, as far away as Harts Range and Ampilatwatja can actually travel to Utopia to a boarding school, to attend middle school and return at weekends?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Everything is being looked at, member for Braitling ...

Mrs BRAHAM: You are not going to give me an answer, are you?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... with the consultations. I am not going to give you any answer because much of it is in the early stages of consultation with all communities, member for Braitling, based on and analysing all of the data we have as to the best placement in each region.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Senior Years Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now consider Output 2.4, Senior Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: I just forgot one question. What is the future of the middle school at ANZAC Hill and Alice Springs High School? Will either of those schools be closing, or will both remain open next year?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is really wider than senior years. I have a lack of knowledge, but I would have thought that comes under ...

Mrs BRAHAM: It actually comes under middle schools.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have just closed that off, and we cannot revisit it. So, if you have a senior years question, I am happy to entertain that. We have closed off the middle years and I cannot reopen it. That has been the ruling on previous occasions.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is a bit tough. It is a simple question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Ask it at the end when we come to non-output and on the basis that it is only one question, I will allow it there.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, that sounds fair.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.4.

Output 2.5 - International Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output 2.5, International Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: In the interests of time, I will not be asking any questions.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 2.5.

Output 2.6 - Tertiary Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move to Output 2.6, Tertiary Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Plenty of questions but, in the interest of time, minister, no.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one question. Could the minister advise me how many scholarships are offered to Territory students to do teacher training? Do these scholarships have to be taken at CDU, or are students able to attend interstate? How many students would we have on those scholarships now? I am talking about promoting teaching in the Territory.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: A good question, member for Braitling. Mr Chairman, in the interest of time, and I know that others are wanting to ask questions and we do need to move on, member for Braitling, I am willing to take that question on notice and get the breakdown for you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you please restate the question, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could the minister advise how many students are on NT scholarships to study teacher education, and can these scholarships be taken interstate or only at CDU?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to that question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, Mr Chairman. I have just been advised by Mr Hased that he can provide that information now for the member for Braitling.

Mr HASSED: These scholarships, or these indigenous students, are all undertaking study here in the Northern Territory. We have 17 in the National Indigenous Cadetship program as at 12 June. We have 12 undertaking indigenous scholarships, and a further nine are undertaking indigenous fellowships, which is a total of 38.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am not talking about just indigenous students. I am talking about students who go on to CDU or to another university to study teacher training. That was my question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There is further information. Mr Chairman, for the purposes of time, as I said, I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 4.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have to ask you to restate the question again member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many students are on scholarships through the NT government to study teacher training at CDU or interstate? If they get a scholarship from government, are they able to utilise it interstate for teacher training?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 4.6.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION Output 3.1 - Primary Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call on questions relating Output Group 3.0, Non-Government Education, Output 3.1, Primary Education. This is non-government Primary Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: A number of questions but, in the interest of time, Mr Chairman, no.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, Yipirinya is a private, non-government school, in Alice Springs. I believe it is funded by the federal government. Could you please advise me what contribution the Northern Territory makes to the Yipirinya school?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The total for Yipirinya is \$290 554.52.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is per capita?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is NT contribution per year. Do you want that broken down in terms of what is recurrent? That is a global figure I have just given you, the \$290 000. If you want recurrent, that is \$163 042.40; that is recurrent per capita. Then they get, for severely disabled, \$119 057.03, library services around \$231, and then a special subsidy of \$8224.09.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you contribute to their production centre, minister? The production centre, is that what you are calling ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The special subsidy. It could be in relation to that, but I can check that, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you advise if you provide any funding for the bussing service to Yipirinya?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, I do not have that here, but I can find it. It could be with Transport and Works, who would cover that.

A witness: It would be DPI.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: DPI.

Mr CHAIRMAN: In which case, you can follow that up with DPI. We have already had them up here.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, okay. That is all for that one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Middle Years Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Middle Years Education. Member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: My only question was earlier: was there a trend to private schools evident when middle school education was introduced?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Braitling, I will refer this question to Mr Ken Davies.

Mr DAVIES: Mrs Braham, I will just countenance in the context of the total figures in the Northern Territory. Enrolments have increased by 817 students as against this time last year across the sector. Indigenous enrolments have ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Is this for the private schools?

Mr DAVIES: No, this is across the system. Specifically in relation to the non-government sector, we have seen a reduction of 326 students in government schools and an increase of 286 in non-government schools. The largest growth area was in non-government provincial schools. In those provincial schools that is 193 students have been - provincial is defined under geo-location as Palmerston and Darwin.

Mrs BRAHAM: Palmerston and Darwin?

Mr DAVIES: Palmerston and Darwin; that is the geo-location by provincial. As I was saying, enrolments have grown by 817 across the system, and we have seen an increase of 696 students in government schools and 182 students in non-government schools. The bulk of the increase was in very remote schools.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thanks, Mr Chairman, that will do.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Senior Years Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Senior Years Education. Member for Braitling, do you have any questions on this one?

Mrs BRAHAM: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3, Senior Years Education and of Output Group 3.0, Non-Government Education.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Output 4.1 – Early Childhood Education

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output Group 4.0, Early Childhood Education, Output 4.1, Early Childhood Education.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you talk about your early learning centres and wellbeing centres. I know in the town camps in Alice Springs the playgroup, for instance, and the Toy Library goes there regularly. There is a bus from one of the schools that collects the town camp children at Little Children's Learning Centre. I am concerned about how you are going to cater for the kids in these town camps, such as Bagot and the ones in Alice Springs, with this early learning. I have

just given you two examples that I know of but, obviously, they are not capturing anywhere near the number of kids that are there.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am sorry, member for Braitling, can you just repeat that. That last bit, I could not hear you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, I am just asking you, how are you going to capture these young kids that you want to capture in this early learning area? What are you providing for them? Are you only talking about centres on remote communities, or are you catering for those kids also on town camps in Darwin, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As per the Prime Minister's announcement, and also our commitment, it is about universal access and greater flexibility in the provision of that. It is not just our remote indigenous communities or our mobile preschools. It is also developing and ensuring that the integration of care and education services are across the board to all kids, regardless of where they live - whether it is in a town camp, in our urban centres or in a remote community.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have any specific programs you are introducing?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In terms of the mobile preschools and what is happening in our town camps and with those programs in Alice Springs, I will refer you to Sue Murphy, who has carriage of those in Alice Springs.

Ms MURPHY: My knowledge is very new. There are programs being introduced at Sadadeen Primary School and Bradshaw Primary School, and they are being supported. In addition, we are looking at expanding our mobile preschool programs. We are also looking at opportunities to work with our town camps through that avenue.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you have talked about three mobile preschools. I feel that is hardly adequate. Where will they be located?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In Central Australia, I believe we have three. It is actually six mobile preschools. Sorry, when I talk about three, member for Braitling, I was talking about the three that are in Central Australia. Out of the six, there is a commitment for three new mobile preschools in Central Australia, which cover the Lasseter, Tanami and Barkly, so servicing two sites each, and those three will expand to five sites. At the moment, they are only with two. An additional mobile preschool in Katherine is also servicing five sites. I believe there is still one more mobile preschool to happen in the Top End.

Mrs BRAHAM: And will they be staffed by teachers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: And assistant teachers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There will be assistant teachers. If you look at the concept, if there are assistant teachers in those outstations or within those sites, those teachers from that main community will work in with the assistant teacher.

Mrs BRAHAM: When you say 'mobile', are you referring to the teachers being mobile, or a caravan being mobile or something?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, the teachers being mobile.

Mrs BRAHAM: The teachers being mobile.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The resources will be out there.

Mrs BRAHAM: So the teachers will go out to these places with resources?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. That concludes consideration of Output 4.1, Early Childhood Education and Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - TRAINING
Output 5.1 – Vocational Education and Training Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0, Training, Output 5.1, Vocational Education and Training Services. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Mr Chairman, knowing that the minister has other portfolio areas and, in the interests of giving you time for those, I will pass.

Mrs BRAHAM: I will go along with him.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of all output groups.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are now going into the Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions. I understand there will not be too many questions and it will be my intention to call a short break after that, because it is nice and tidy, if that is convenient with you?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, there were a couple of questions that were taken on notice. There was one on workers' compensation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have the number that is associated with that question?

Answer to Question on Notice No 4.5

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have a response, I think it was 4.4, regarding support to the 200 teachers. I also table some of the additional support that we have in answer to your question in relation to the 200 teachers.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have been informed that is actually No 4.5 – workers' compensation. We are having tabled the answers to Output 4.5?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Question on notice No 4.5, Mr Chairman. John Hassed has those figures as well. I am not sure if it was the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Braitling who asked in relation to workers compensation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It does not matter if you are tabling the answer, it goes to the committee.

Mr HASSED: In answer to the question about the number of claims over five years, there are 18 current claims in the system of which five are subject for negotiation in terms of possible settlement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to the non-output specific budget related questions. Leader of the Opposition?

Mr MILLS: Minister these are questions related to DEET itself. Can you provide how many executives work for the department, both executive contract and non-contract? How many of those executives have personal assistants, executive assistants, executive information coordinators, or administrative assistants? Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Leader of the Opposition, I will refer that question to Mr John Hassed.

Mr HASSED: In terms of executive contracts, currently in the corporate stream there are 30 executive contract officers, and sitting in that stream there are two executive contract principals. In the school stream we have three executive contract officers, 77 executive contract principals and two executive contract teachers. There also 17 executive officers. In terms of assistants,

personal or executive assistants, there are currently 25. No executive contract officer has more than one executive assistant. Those executive assistants, in some cases, support more than one but, generally across the board, those executive assistants will provide services beyond that contract officer they work with.

Mr MILLS: Can that information you read out be tabled?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I can table that.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister. Minister, are you able to provide a list of any consultancies which were engaged during the course of the year; how many ended up more expensive than the initial costing due to variations? I am happy for that to be tabled if that is available.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is the executive contract details?

Mr MILLS: No, this is the list of any consultancies that were engaged during the course of the year, and also variations on the cost of that consultancy.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The consultancies for 2007-08 are \$1.4m, Leader of the Opposition. The part of the question that you asked in terms of the variants, I will take that on notice and get that amount back to you.

Question on Notice No 4.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please restate the question for *Hansard*, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: Provide a list of any consultancies that were engaged during the course of the year, and include also variations to initial cost estimates?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, you are prepared to take that question on notice.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 4.7.

Mr MILLS: Minister, how many people are involved in DEET for media and marketing management? The number, their level, and the cost of that service provision?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The DEET media and marketing is about \$1.316m. There are 11 staff in that branch, the Communications Media and Media and Marketing branch. Is that what you want?

Mr MILLS: That will do. Thank you. Can you provide the cost of advertising for DEET? Global cost.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. \$332 000 and that includes *Classmates* which is \$137 000.

Mr MILLS: The efficiency dividend. It is not 3%. It is 1.75% or 1.5%. Is that correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, can you just restate your question?

Mr MILLS: What is the dollar figure on the efficiency dividend as it applies to DEET? The Treasurer has imposed an efficiency dividend and I understand it is 1.5% or 1.75% for DEET, and 3% for other agencies.

Ms HARDING: Katrina Harding, Chief Financial Officer. The percentage of efficiency dividend is 0.75% because the level of reduction does not apply to service delivery areas.

Mr MILLS: It is 0.75%.

Ms HARDING: 0.75%.

Mr MILLS: Okay, so what is the dollar figure on that?

Ms HARDING: I am sorry. I do not have the information before me. It is either \$1.3m or \$1.6m.

Mr MILLS: You will be on target to achieve that efficiency dividend, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I suppose we are. It is across the agency.

Mr MILLS: Is that efficiency dividend applied to the *Closing the Gap* money that comes from the federal government?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is Australian government money. I will refer this question to the Chief Executive Officer.

Ms BANKS: The amount was \$1.628m in 2007-08 and the same amount in 2008-09. It does not apply to *Closing the Gap*.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. My last question, minister, when you informed us that you had one meeting with the education union, at what stage of the negotiations did that occur?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I cannot recall the actual date, Leader of the Opposition. I think it was probably early in the piece - and rightly so. All matters to do with the EBA and the handling of that, and discussions with the AEU occur with the Minister for Public Employment.

Mr MILLS: As you said. Minister, was that relevant minister with you at that meeting?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We were both at that meeting.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. That is all my questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions?

Mr CONLAN: I have one, Mr Chairman. It is about the shade at Centralian College. I have written to you, minister. I do not understand why it is such a challenge for the department to provide simple shade structures, considering we are putting \$500 000 into the opening of a waterfront. It is \$25 000 or so for a couple of simple shade structures at Charles Darwin University, and this is a request from Charles Darwin University and the Centralian Senior Secondary College.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, I have not seen the letter you have written to me. I have had an approach in relation to that shade cloth. There has not been, as I understand it, a request from CDU for that shade cloth.

Mr CONLAN: Or Centralian Senior Secondary College itself? I am on the school council and I believe that they have requested shade and ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, I have not seen that request. Certainly, if you want to forward it to me, I will have a look at that. But, to date, I am saying to you I have not received that request.

Mr CONLAN: Would you think though, minister, that it is imperative that shade be provided at Centralian College for that oval. It is major sporting ground; it is used every single day of the school year, used for the Masters Games, and every single weekend by the cricket and the football communities. Alice Springs is bathed or baked in sunlight at 40°C-plus for a lot of the year. It is imperative, I would have thought, as a health and safety issue that we provide the best possible sporting facilities and provide shade.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before you answer, it is actually a specific question about secondary education in the government sector which is a specific output group. I will allow the minister discretion to answer it on the basis that we whip through. Usually, I would simply say it is a specific output group and I would knock it out. Minister, I will give you the discretion to answer it, given the history.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Thank you Mr Chairman. Member for Greatorex, we do take it seriously. I realise that in Alice Springs it does get hot, and I know that Central Australia has had record hot seasons of 40°C-plus. I will endeavour to take on board and check the minor new works; it is probably on the minor new works program. I will have a look and get back to you on that specific issue.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. That will do for questions from me, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of all outputs within Employment, Education and Training. On behalf of the committee, thank you all for your attendance here this morning.

The committee will now move on to the next portfolios of Families, Women's Policy and Child Protection which sit within the Department of Health and Families. We will take this opportunity to break as we change over.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILIES

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will reconvene if everyone is set.

Minister, welcome. I invite you, once again, to introduce the officials you have accompanying you and, if you wish to do so, make an opening statement for the portfolio responsibilities which sit within the Department of Health and Families.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I introduce Dr David Ashbridge, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Health and Families; Ms Jenny Scott, Assistant Secretary, NT Families and Children; and Ms Penny Fielding, Acting Assistant Secretary, Community Services.

I will have other officers with me for other output areas, and I will introduce them as they appear.

From 1 July 2008, the Department of Health and Community Services will be restructured to better align government programs delivering services for families, children and young people. The Henderson government has placed great emphasis on the importance of supporting Territory families and being able to respond appropriately to key issues of child protection and youth justice. The realignment of resources also takes in some functions from other Northern Territory government agencies, and is designed to better facilitate ongoing implementation and expansion of *Closing the Gap* programs and implementation of some of our other new initiatives.

I will take you through these changes and how they have been reflected in 2008-09 Budget Papers. The new Department of Health and Families will include a new division, NT Families and Children. This new division will have responsibility for the following new outputs that are outlined in the 2008-09 Budget Papers: Family and Parent Support Services, Child Protection Services, Out of Home Care Services, Youth Services, and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Services. These outputs include most of the activities that previously sat in Family and Children's Services output group as well as some youth-related activities and outputs that previously sat under Police, Justice and the Department of Chief Minister's output group. The Office of Women's Policy and Youth Affairs will move to NT Families and Children, along with juvenile community corrections, youth camps and many youth diversion programs. The performance measures for women's advancement activities now appear in the Family and Parent Support Services output. The performance measures for the Youth Advancement activities now appear in Youth Services output.

Another change that will take effect from 1 July 2008 is that I will be consolidating government's resources for early childhood programs within the Department of Employment, Education and Training. The childcare and early childhood development programs and Family and Children's Services will be combining with the Early Childhood Education programs within the Department of Employment, Education and Training. This realignment will position the Northern Territory government to maximise the Australian government's investment in expanding early childhood

services and implement these new initiatives in a way that integrates with the Northern Territory's *Closing the Gap* initiatives in this area.

The final structural changes that I will outline for you relate to the output groups of Aged and Disability Services, Office of Senior Territorians, and Mental Health Services. These programs will be combined with the Community Health Services program to form the Health and Wellbeing Services group within the new Department of Health and Families. The Health Research output has been included with the Alcohol and Other Drugs, Environmental Health and Disease Control outputs to form an expanded Public Health Services group. In line with this change, my colleague, the Minister for Health, will take responsibility for these programs and output groups from July.

My parliamentary colleagues and I have agreed that, despite these changes occurring for the 2008-09 financial year at this estimates hearing, we will take questions relating to our current portfolio responsibilities. Consequently, I will be taking questions in relation to Family and Children Services, Aged and Disability Services, Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs.

The ministers for Health, Justice, Police, Seniors and Youth will take all questions in relation to their current portfolio areas. As in previous years, my colleague, the Minister for Health, will provide you with the overall budget position for the Department of Health and Community Services and take questions on the corporate activities of the agency.

I realise that these changes can be very confusing so, to assist with the understanding the restructure of outputs and agency functions, I will now provide you with an explanation of the output budget variations for my Family and Community output group.

For this exercise, it is important to note that the functional transfer across government has been reflected in the budget papers for 2008-09, across with back-cast 2007-08 budget figures for comparison purposes. I wish to assure the committee that the transfer of functions has been cost neutral. In fact, as you can see by the output figures on page 144, many budgets have grown in my portfolio area. Where there are apparent reductions in the budget, this is due to the Australian government funding that was provided in 2007-08, but is not allocated for 2008-09, or negotiations have not yet been finalised for inclusion in the budget papers. Further revenue is anticipated.

There has been no reduction in NT funding for any of my output groups. There has actually been an increase in NT funding for most areas. The Northern Territory Family and Children's output budget increased during the 2007-08 financial year from \$66.45m to \$81.19m, an increase of \$14.74m or 22%. The budget for 2008-09 is \$83.291m and a further increase of \$2.103m on the final 2007-08 budget. In 2008-09, you will note positive variations of \$130 000 in the Family and Parent Support Services, \$5.23m in Child Protection Services; and \$1.3m in Out of Home Care Services output. This is a result of increased Northern Territory government funding in these areas. The reduction in the Family Violence and Youth Services output budget relates to the offset between increased Northern Territory funding and reductions in Australian government funding.

The funding for services for the frail aged and people with a disability shows a reduction of \$2.378m. This is due to the late finalisation of the 2008-09 agreement with the Australian government for the transition of HACS' CDEP positions into real jobs after the budget was published. This program, commenced in October 2007, has resulted in 254 'real' community care positions in the Northern Territory. An additional 50 positions will be transitioned from 1 July 2008. Similarly, the output budgets for Mental Health Services and Alcohol and Other Drugs Services also show a reduction but, again, this is due to reductions in Australian government funding not yet finalised for inclusion in the 2008-09 papers. The Alcohol and Other Drugs program has since finalised the agreement for the Illicit Drug Strategy which has been extended for a further 12 months.

Let me now turn to some of the highlights in our budget. In 2008-09, there will be the final instalment of \$2m for the fifth year of the Caring for Our Children child protection reform package. This will primarily be used to support the increasing number of children and young people in care, but will also fund a new \$250 000 family support service for refugee families through the Melaleuca Refugee Centre in Darwin.

There will be a total of \$8.15m to continue and expand on *Closing the Gap* initiatives commenced in 2007-08. Importantly, the Child Abuse Task Force will be continued and expanded, sexual assault services will continue to be expanded across the Northern Territory, and some

specific Aboriginal child protection and care services will be established. There will be an additional \$2.5m to implement new youth justice measures, including family responsibility agreements and orders, and the youth camps. These new initiatives have been highlighted in the past few weeks. I will not talk any further on them.

In the area of Disability Services, we are providing an additional \$1.3m in 2008-09, resulting from the Disability Services review. In the area of responding to needs of people with substance abuse problems, there will be an increase of \$800 000 to expand treatment places for people who are subject to an order from the alcohol courts. Negotiations are under way with the Australian government in relation to additional treatment, workforce support, and aftercare effort, as part of the COAG agreement. This will provide an additional \$8m over four years. The Disability Services budget will be further increased by an additional \$21.8m over four years from 2008-09, following agreement with the Australia government and state and territory ministers on the 30 May 2008. This will result in additional supported accommodation respite, including day options and case management for people with disabilities in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory government has matched the Australian government's offer of \$10.9m to achieve this injection of funds.

In closing, I draw your attention to a brand new output in 2008-09 which captures the costs and activities of the new Office of the Children's Commissioner. The role of the Children's Commissioner was created in the new *Care and Protection of Children Act* passed in the November sittings last year. As I previously announced, Dr Howard Bath has been appointed to this independent statutory position, and I am delighted that he will be commencing work next week on the 23 June. The budget for the new office is \$360 000 in 2008-09.

As mentioned at the outset of my statement today, I will be taking questions relating to my current portfolio, and I now invite questions from the committee.

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

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Hello, minister. Good afternoon, everybody. Just a yes or no answer if I could? You talked about the Australian government funding and you went into some detail of that. Does that explain why, in Budget Paper No 3 from last year's budget for Child Protection Services, the amount allocated was \$35.76m and, in this year's budget paper for Child Protection Services, it was \$26.367m? It appears, obviously, there is a reduction. Is the explanation a change of the Australian government funding?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, as I understand it, it is the back-casting. If you want some further information on that, I can get it.

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you. No further questions on that opening statement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 as they relate to the minister's responsibilities within the Department of Health and Families.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – NT FAMILY AND CHILDREN **Output 1.1 – Family and Parent Support Services**

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, NT Family and Children, Output 1.1, Family and Parent Support Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: There are, Mr Chairman, but, again, with the shortage of time, I am happy to go straight to Output 1.2 if there are no other questions from others.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I will concede also.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concedes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Child Protection Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now call for questions on Output 1.2, Child Protection Services. Member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, we have 50 minutes which is nowhere near enough time. I wonder whether - in order for me to pursue my questions, and your departmental staff who have, no doubt, prepared answers to anticipated questions - you would be agreeable to arranging a briefing, perhaps in the next month or so, so that I can obtain the answers to the questions I wanted to ask. I will undertake to give them to you in advance because I actually really want some answers to the questions I have prepared. Would you be agreeable to that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, I would be prepared to provide and arrange for that briefing.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I know it is unusual for a questioner to give some sort of introductory statement, but I wonder whether you would indulge me to this extent. I wanted to use this time to actually get answers in relation to this very important area. I believe we have demonstrated to each other, as well as others, that we are committed to this area and can work in a bipartisan way. Against that background, I wanted to let you know pretty much where I was going to go with my questions.

In essence, I want to know how many extra child protection workers have been employed and where? How much money has been spent and on what? How many notifications and substantiated matters have there been in 2007-08? What improvements have been made in the area of child protection since May 2006? I chose that date because that was the date of the *Lateline* interviews and, while the rest of the country seemed pretty surprised about the issues, you and I both know that they have been happening for a long time. I picked 2006 because I think Territorians and, indeed, other Australians, will pick that as an important date where we wanted to see some changes occur. So, that is where I am going. Against that background, can you tell me, how many child protection workers are currently employed in the Northern Territory and where are they?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, with the FACS' operations, average staffing establishment of 194 FTE this financial year. If you wanted to, I could either table or go through for you the different levels, like from P4 through to various administrative staff.

Ms CARNEY: If you could table them that would be preferred.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I could certainly provide and table them for you.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Does that table actually identify child protection workers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It goes from your senior managers, team leaders, community welfare workers, which is the biggest part of it, so from our P1s and P2s, which is around 81 staff, then Aboriginal community workers and senior Aboriginal workers, around 37, and then family support workers and youth workers, 22. Then you have specialist positions with adoptions, workers who work in the court system, indigenous liaison officers, Aboriginal community workers and DV counsellors. I have no problems with tabling this table for your information.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Reviewing all of the material, media releases, public documents and comments of ministers, there are a number of terms used in relation to child protection workers. They include, but are not limited to Specialist Child Care Interviewers; Child Protection and Family Support workers; specialist FACS staff; specialist FACS staff for the Child Abuse Task Force; and Forensic Child Protection workers. Does that table include all of those people, or are they the same people? Who are we talking about?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It does include some of this but, if you want more detail in breaking down those positions during the briefing, we can break down all of those positions and just where they sit. That includes the additional 91 staff that have come in on that.

Ms CARNEY: So, it is fair to say that currently in the Northern Territory using a fairly elastic description of child protection workers, do I understand you to say that there are 81?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There are 81. When I looked at the graph, community welfare workers - these are workers carrying out the statutory functions under the *Care and Protection Act* - as I understand, is 81. That includes the mixture of the Aboriginal community workers and youth workers that work with the 81 child protection workers.

Ms CARNEY: Is it possible to identify how many? Does anyone actually have the title in FACS of 'child protection worker'?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think it is still classified as community welfare worker.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, we can pursue that in a briefing. So we have 81, let us say community ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, the 81 - the P2s who are the team leaders do carry out that statutory function under the act, and that is an additional 20. So you are talking about the 20 plus the 81 which is categorised under Community Welfare. But many of those P2s who are in that category of team leaders would also be classified as community welfare workers administering the statutory functions required under *the Care and Protection Act*.

Ms CARNEY: So we are up to 101?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, 101.

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, member for Araluen. Is it possible to go through the tabling of a copy of that table now? It does take a little while for a copy to reach the committee.

Ms CARNEY: Budget Paper No 3, page 146, estimates there will be 3600 notifications of child harm in 2007-08. What is the actual figure to date?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Notification today up to March: 2627.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, say again.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: 2627.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks. Something I forgot to ask in relation to staffing, the 101 sum total of the community workers you identified, they are actual people? We are not just talking about positions? They are positions that have human beings working in them?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, they are actual people. I can seek further clarification if

Ms CARNEY: No, I can see nodding heads, so that is fine. Thank you. The estimate of notifications was 3600 in 2007-08. You have 2627. Your predecessor said in last year's estimate she expected there to be a spike in notification as a result of the intervention. That appears not to have materialised. Why is that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There has been some spike in terms of the intervention and the child health checks that occurred between July 2007 and July 2008 which was the main part of Phase 1. The notes I have, member for Araluen, from the 15 May, state 50% of the estimated indigenous child population from the 73 prescribed communities covered by the intervention, of the 773 children that were recorded as having that check, around 42 children were referred to FACS because of concerns of either child abuse or neglect, or to address child and family support needs. Our FACS data as of 20 May indicates that only 40 referrals were received from the Australian government. Do you want a regional breakdown of those referrals?

Ms CARNEY: Do you have that in table form?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Not in table form. If I had it in table form I would give it to you. Eleven for Central Australia; four in Katherine; seven in East Arnhem; eight in Darwin rural; eight in the Child Abuse Task Force, that is in the north; and two through the after-hours team. It is not in a table but, maybe for time purposes, I could table this which just shows the 40 referrals - 19 related to

child protection concerns; out of that 19, 14 were classified as child protection notification and five referrals did not proceed due to insufficient information, or those concerns did not meet that criteria under the *Community Welfare Act*.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, if you could table that, it would be good.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I just clarify for you, where I said 2627 is for those three quarters to date; the projected total notifications over the whole year is 3503.

Ms CARNEY: So from March to the end of this financial year you are expecting to get up to - how many?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The projected total notifications 3503.

Ms CARNEY: Which was, I think, an increase from the previous years. So you would expect to see not only an increase as a result of the intervention, but as a result of the initiatives that your government has implemented, would you not?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: I am surprised it is so low, which should tell us something, I think. But we can come back to that at another time.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, the additional resources, the timeliness of those responses, has a lot to do with that as well.

Ms CARNEY: I can come to that, thank you. Reading the estimates exchanges last year was an unedifying experience in my view because not much progress seemed to be made. I am not going to go down the path of giving you a serve in relation to why it is you do not meet your - that is FACS' - time lines in relation to Categories 1, 2 and 3 matters. However, in the 2006-07 annual report, there seems to be a consistent theme: the department is pretty consistently failing to meet its own benchmarks when it comes to dealing with Categories 1, 2 and 3 complaints. Last year in estimates, a Mr Richardson from the department gave numerous answers that amount to - and he said on various occasions - the remote nature of the notifications is why those benchmarks in terms of timeliness cannot be met. Is that your view as well?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We have endeavoured to put as much resources and time to respond to that timeliness, member for Araluen. For any child abuse incident, whether it is in town or out in our remote communities, we should be able to respond within that appropriate time frame that we set for ourselves.

Ms CARNEY: So you are failing, and have done over some years. No doubt it occurred before your government came to office. There seems to be a consistent theme that about 20% in each category you fall short in terms of meeting the deadlines. Do you say that as a result of the Child Abuse Task Force and the mobile team, about which you have spoken in and out of the parliament, they will resolve those timeliness issues in remote areas?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, can you just repeat that?

Ms CARNEY: I will put it a different way. Last year, a Mr Richardson from your department ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I got that bit. It was just the last bit that you were talking about.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. You have a Child Abuse Task Force, you have a mobile team of child protection workers - 10 from what you have said in parliament - in bush areas. Is your aim to reduce the ongoing problems with meeting the time lines of dealing with Categories 1, 2 and 3 investigations?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. The answer is yes. Putting in place, and establishing - particularly the commitment to establish - some of the Aboriginal services out in those remote communities, will go a long way to addressing some of those response times.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, member for Araluen. Minister, you were going table a second document. Do you have that ready to table?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was that breakdown. Do you still want that?

Ms CARNEY: If you could.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am just making sure that I gave her the right paper.

Ms CARNEY: You and I both. Given the difficulties identified by Mr Richardson last year, and given that your government has had 12 months and lots of money to attend to those problems, can you tell me how many extra child protection workers have been put, or work, in remote communities in the Northern Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer this question to Jenny Scott to go through with those additional positions and how, member for Araluen.

Ms SCOTT: Jenny Scott, Assistant Secretary, NT Families and Children. In the 2007-08 year, we created an additional 20 position across the division. Many of those - I have a table here - were in the Child Abuse Task Force in the Barkly, Katherine and Darwin remote area, in East Arnhem, and in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. If you could table that, that would be great. So, a total of 20? That is what we are talking about? Twenty extra child protection workers in the bush? Yes?

Ms SCOTT: No, they are not all in the bush, but there are 20 that were created in 2007-08.

Ms CARNEY: How many of those 20 - you do not need to identify where - are in the bush?

Ms SCOTT: If you are interested in the number that actually - they do not live in the bush, but they work in the bush.

Ms CARNEY: Live, work in the bush.

Ms SCOTT: There was one in the Barkly, one in Katherine, one in Darwin remote, one in East Arnhem, three in Alice Springs, and four into the Child Abuse Task Force whose predominant work is across the ...

Ms CARNEY: That is the Child Abuse Task Force in Darwin or Alice Springs? There is one in each, is there?

Ms SCOTT: The one in Alice Springs. There is - sorry, it is actually five in the task force.

Ms CARNEY: All based in Alice Springs?

Ms SCOTT: Two are based in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, a total 11 ...

Ms SCOTT: Sorry, I am trying to substitute from this table which are the remotes or not. I can table this if you like.

Ms CARNEY: Obviously, after estimates at our briefing we can go through the material in more detail. Do you accept 11 child protection workers in 2007-08 were deployed in the bush - even though they do not live there, they work there - four of whom are based in Alice Springs? Fair assessment?

Ms SCOTT: Yes, I would like to go through it in more detail with you but, given the table, it would be okay.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. What about the mobile team? Last week in parliament, you talked about the mobile team. You said that there were 12 people in it, 10 of whom were child protection workers. I understand there is only one mobile team. Correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: So, of those 11 positions created for people to work in the bush. Does that include the mobile team, or is the mobile team extra?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is extra, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so we have this entity called the mobile team, that is 10. Correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: I am keen to get the numbers, because there are a lot of numbers floating around and I would very much like to work out where they all are. Okay, so you have 11 plus 10 in the mobile team. That mobile team is based in the Top End, correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When we do that briefing, member for Araluen, we will also do it by the chart, so that you can see who sits where.

Ms CARNEY: I am up to 21 positions, child protection workers, real people working in remote areas, generally, in the Northern Territory in the last 12 months – an extra 21 positions. I want to ask you now about various announcements under *Closing the Gap*. First, in the *Closing the Gap* document, page 4 of the recommendations, it says that, since 2002, 71 new child protection positions had been created. In the department's fact sheet about *Closing the Gap*, it says that, since 2004, 71 new child protection positions had been created. How many positions were created? What is the answer? Was it since 2002 or 2004?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer the question to Jenny Scott.

Ms CARNEY: Basically, if there was a typo, in which document? Which one? How many?

Ms SCOTT: The 71 is actually since 2001.

Ms CARNEY: 2001?

Ms SCOTT: Well, the 2002-03, so that end of 2001-02.

Ms CARNEY: So it is 2001-02? Okay. So, 71 positions created since 2001-02. *Closing the Gap* was published in August 2007. So, in five years, across the Northern Territory, 71 new child protection positions were created. Then we went national and international in May 2006, and we have 21 positions created in the last 12 months in the bush, 21 positions - that is a fair summary?

Ms SCOTT: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Can you answer me this? In *Closing the Gap*, in the fact sheet issued by the department, it says that the government will: '... recruit an additional 10 child protection and family support workers at a cost \$6.8m'. Is that 10 the people employed in the mobile team, or are they extras somewhere?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Some of those positions which were immediately recruited, as I understand, went into the task force, because that was where we wanted to put – that was the 9.7 that you talked about ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, where did you get 9.7 from?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am reading. With the extra positions, the 10, some of those positions in the child abuse task force and the mobile. That is the 10 that you are talking about, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Right, so *Closing the Gap* says we are going to get 10 child protection workers. They are the mobile teams. So we are still at the figure of 21. Why then does it also say elsewhere in *Closing the Gap* that there will be an expansion of the Child Abuse Task Force, and I quote: '... including an additional 23 FACS staff'. Where did those 23 come from and go to?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Bear in mind that 23 is over five years, member for Araluen, it is not immediate; it is over five years.

Ms CARNEY: I can come back to that. Twenty-three over five years, is that what you are saying?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is expanding 23 FACS staff, 24 police and specialist child interviewers, over five years.

Ms CARNEY: So we have 23 additional FACS staff over five years. Then, in your budget reply speech a week or so ago, you said that, in *Closing the Gap*, government announced, and I quote: '... an additional 10 workers over the next five years'. I think even a casual observer will understand why there is some confusion here. There are a lot of numbers being rattled off by all and sundry, but I cannot quite seem to track where they are and whether they are real, or just figures thrown out. You said before it was 23 workers over five years. Where did you get 10 workers over the next five years? Is that in addition or is that included in the 23?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That would be in addition to.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So we have 23 over five years, plus in your budget speech last week. So, it is definitely plus 10 over five years?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, member for Araluen?

Ms CARNEY: So it is definitely 23 over five years, plus 10 over five years.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If you have a look at *Closing the Gap* we said we would recruit an additional 10. So there is an addition 10 child protection and family support workers, then there is the additional 23 FACS staff. All up we are talking about 33 additional FACS workers and, out of that 33 over five years, we would put as an addition to the child protection system.

Ms CARNEY: So a global figure of 33 over five years. Do you appreciate why I am concerned about this? That is not very many. That is not very many when you look at the notifications now and projected, both as you said earlier and in the budget estimates. Lots of money, Territory and federal government money - and all I am seeing is 33 extra child protection workers around the Northern Territory.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Over five years. That is on top of what we already have in the system. That is including all of the other areas. That is building on - whilst you have specialist child protection workers, it is also recruiting and training and putting in place the Aboriginal community workers. We can have as many specialist staff, but we also need to bear in mind that we do train and recruit Aboriginal child protection workers on the ground in those communities, so that is additional to the 33.

Ms CARNEY: But 33 specialist child protection workers employed in 2007-08 as a result of *Closing the Gap*?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, there would be more because if you look at recruiting the ...

Ms CARNEY: Where are they?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are continuing the recruitment. Member for Araluen, you would understand most, apart from anyone else, as with teachers, this is another area where the recruitment and retaining of these workers is very hard. That is why, as well as continuing the recruitment to get this vital worker into this system, it is about building the capacity on the ground in our communities to try to deal with this issue. It is trying to get experienced and specialist child protection workers, and it is also training and developing our Aboriginal child protection workers out in our remote community.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So that I have it right, Ms Scott referred to the 11 deployed in remote areas; they are real people, real child protection workers doing work there. There are 10 in the mobile team; that is 21. And you expect to have an extra 33 over five years which is a few a year, and you have not - sorry, can I ask have you started recruiting?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In addition to the 101 that were ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, yes, sure. I accept that. They are the existing ones. But the nation seems to be watching in terms of what the federal government and the Northern Territory government are going to do in achieving outcomes. I understand why you want to put more in the field, as you should, but there is an awful lot of money going to this area. I am a little surprised at how relatively few child protection workers there are. Having said that, in relation to your comments in parliament last week, you said \$1.7m had been allocated for, you said, 10 workers over two years. Does that \$1.7m include advertising costs, removal expenses and so on for those 10 workers over five years, which is the rate of two a year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Is this the mobile team you are referring to?

Ms CARNEY: You did not specify. You said 10 workers over the next five years.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, that would be the mobile team.

Ms CARNEY: That is mobile?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: So, \$1.7m will be spent, as I understood your comments, in 2008-09 for 10 extra workers. That is two a year, and there is \$1.7m allocated to that. Does it cost \$1.7m to get two extra child protection workers next year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am trying to take my thoughts back to what I said in parliament and not having what I said ...

Ms CARNEY: Let me read it to you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, you do not need to read it to me. I am just trying to flick through, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: I guess while you are flicking through the paperwork, the natural follow-up question is: if it is not going to cost \$1.7m how much will it cost to get two extra positions per year?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: \$1.7m is in relation to the mobile child protection team, member for Araluen, and that is to cover the travel to regional and remote areas to do the statutory welfare services.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The Child Abuse Task Force is in Alice Springs and Darwin. How many specialist child protection workers are in the task force at each location?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Araluen, I will refer this question to the CEO.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: David Ashbridge, Chief Executive Officer. The CAT team in Darwin at the Peter McAulay Centre is comprised of FACS workers - four child protection workers, a manager and two admin officers. It is comprised of Northern Territory Police - six detectives including a tactical commander and a transport officer ...

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry, but I was not asking about the police. My question was about FACS workers. Can you answer that please?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I will repeat: It was four child protection workers, a manager and two administrative officers and a second, CAT South, has been established in Alice Springs in November 2007, Family and Children Services, two child protection workers and a team leader.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, do you have a regional breakdown of the notifications received in 2007-08? You said to March 2006 it was up to 27. Do you have a regional breakdown of where those notifications came from?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have them on me, but I can get those figures to you, and the breakdown of those regions.

Ms CARNEY: Are you, as minister, ordinarily provided with that information?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Because it is an area of great interest, member for Araluen, I do regularly, through my briefings with the Assistant Secretary of that area, go through the statistics or the numbers per region and then from what communities within that region.

Ms CARNEY: Which regions stand out in the numbers of notifications, in your experience?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We have quite a high number in Central Australia.

Ms CARNEY: Would that be the highest - generally speaking?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Generally speaking, yes.

Ms CARNEY: Then why is it that you have only two child protection workers and a team leader at the Child Abuse Task Force in Alice Springs; that you have a 10-member mobile team which is predominantly focused in the Top End?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: When you talk about those three workers that you talked about in the task force, that is additional to the staff already in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: When you released the Bath report, I think in December last year, you said that some of the practices identified in Dr Bath's audit were unacceptable. You said: 'Strengthening is particularly necessary in some regional offices and the Alice Springs branch will be a focus'. What were the problems, and have they been addressed? How many real people in terms of child protection workers are working there?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It continues to be a concern, member for Araluen. The recruitment and getting the additional resources into the Central Australian region is a priority. We do need to focus our efforts with more emphasis in the Central Australian region. Whilst I say we have high numbers in Central Australia, we also have high numbers in parts of Arnhem Land. However, that does not get away from the fact that Central Australia as a whole – and I am not just talking Alice Springs but also the Barkly and those regions come in as part of that. I am not saying that what we have put today is special. We need to do more and we need to continue the recruitment and get additional positions in, as well as putting the Aboriginal community worker positions on the ground in those communities.

Ms CARNEY: And they are not on the ground yet?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As far as I know, no.

Ms CARNEY: *Closing the Gap* was released in August last year. That must be enormously disappointing to you not to have had any people take up those positions since pretty much everything was outlined in the government blueprint. How many child protection workers are currently employed in Alice Springs? What is the establishment – for want of a better word?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The overall FACS staffing establishment, as I understand, is 27 ...

Ms CARNEY: In Alice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is 27, with an additional FTE of three. So there are three additional FTEs in Alice Springs as part of the CAT South.

Ms CARNEY: So there are 20 real people?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Twenty-seven real people.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, 27. Do I take it from your earlier comments that there should be more; that you are after more?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, if we look at the complexities and issues in Central Australia, we do need more. Over the next five years, the money that has been allocated under *Closing the Gap*, will provide those additional resources.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, are we finishing at 1 pm?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are.

Ms CARNEY: How many positions have been advertised in relation to the Alice Springs office that have been unfilled for six months or longer?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have those figures with me, but we can pursue them. I will provide that for you.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. The area of child protection has many dimensions, obviously. One of them - from memory, it may have been in *Closing the Gap* or accompanying statements - I believe has been a recognition by government that, in addition to actually putting people on the ground, you need to build the capacity of the child protection workers. Correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Do you have, as Minister for Child Protection, details of prosecutions that result in substantiated notifications?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I do not get that, but that has certainly been something that we have discussed. There needs to be, I suppose, a coming back from the moment the notification is done, but we do not have those figures. They do not come back in terms of completion rates with prosecution.

Ms CARNEY: Can I ask whether you, as minister, would seriously consider being provided with that information? We can have thousands of child protection workers on the ground, but we need those workers to be as skilled as they possibly can be in collecting the right material that they can then pass on to prosecutors, and, of course, these workers will be giving evidence. So, at the other end, if you like, yes, we want to prevent kids from being abused, yes, we want lots of child protection workers, but we have the prosecution rates, do we not? So, would you seriously consider that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of that is being considered, member for Araluen, and we will provide that as part of the briefing of the work that we are doing with police and child protection workers as part of that.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many notifications of the 2627 received up to March this year included notifications of child pornography - pornography being an offence?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have those breakdowns of how many. I was going through previously, from the moment the notification was done and the breakdown with that. The percentage rates of sexual abuse is about 15% or around 394. Out of the 2627, 26%, or 683, were for emotional abuse; 33%, or 867, were for neglect; around 26%, or 683, were for physical abuse; and 15% for sexual abuse, or around 394.

Ms CARNEY: Do you have that in table form?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We do. That is notifications?

MS CARNEY: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, I can table that. Out of the 2627 notifications that were put through, 1187 proceeded to investigation. Then, once that 1187 went to investigation, about 417 were actually substantiated.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. That is very useful information, which is obviously contained in my questions. Of the 15% who fall under the banner of sexual abuse, does that include child pornography notifications? Is the department notified about child pornography?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that to Jenny Scott.

Ms SCOTT: The notification for child sexual abuse could be for a range of matters. They are predominantly about where there is suspected maltreatment to the child. So, if the matter was just about the possession of pornography, it is not captured in those figures. If it was about the use of pornography as part of the maltreatment of the child, then that would be part of the sexual abuse.

Ms CARNEY: I think what you are saying is that you actually do not have specific child pornography notifications. You cannot collect that data?

Ms SCOTT: Our data is related to the offence or the relationship to the child.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I raise it because there seems to be an increasing number of prosecutions. We have seen it on television pretty regularly, which is great. I am not entirely sure that my fellow Territorians understand that not only is it the law to report child abuse, but I feel certain that many Territorians do not understand they have an obligation to report child pornography. I will leave it at that. Maybe, minister, you can think about that in running education campaigns or something like that, because I think it is bubbling away behind the scenes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I believe with the Australian government intervention and the whole issue of pornography into some of those prescribed communities has been promoted and some of those signs, but a lot of that is in the jurisdiction of the police. If they investigate and it is substantiated, then that is transferred to police for the charges.

Ms CARNEY: But you agree it is an issue that you could give some perhaps further attention to and work out how we can do better in that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Time is running out and we can pursue more *Closing the Gap* stuff in the briefing. I wanted to ask you about the story last year, I believe, about the 12-year-old girl who died in foster care. The report in the local newspaper said that someone claimed that there were a total of 15 people living in the three-bedroom house where this girl died. I do not propose to go into any more details of the case, but you are aware of that case, obviously?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This is the Palmerston case? Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Given that the former Chief Minister, and I think some of her colleagues, asserted that overcrowding caused sexual abuse or abuse of children, why is it that FACS put a foster child in a three-bedroom house that had 15 people in it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That was a most unfortunate death, member for Araluen. It was that case and another case which laid the basis for the high-risk audit that was put in place by the former minister with this portfolio. Part of that high-risk audit highlighted a number of deficiencies and recommendations which FACS took on board. There have been a number of changes within that system to ensure that that young girl's death, and the death at Santa Teresa, will never happen again. This system is responsive in the right way, so that the high-risk audit highlighted that we needed to put in place a number of things and that has been done.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, the average Territorian would not expect, in future, for a foster kid to be put in a home of 15 people?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And part of that system's improvement was putting in place a quality improvement assessment team which goes and moves across, particularly with a focus on FACS and those placements of those children.

Ms CARNEY: Just to be clear, can Territorians expect that their foster children will not be put in three-bedroom houses with lots of people in them?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are endeavouring to do that. It is a major issue in the placement of children with foster carers. Let me say as the minister, I would not want any child coming into the minister's care placed in a home that is overcrowded.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Final question, the Bath Report, there were a number of recommendations. You did not make the entire report public. I wish you had, but you did not. In terms of the recommendations, have all of the recommendations been implemented?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As far as I know, yes, across the agency.

Ms CARNEY: One very final question: the child impact analysis, which was one of the recommendations in *Closing the Gap*, by December 2007 the government aimed to have child impact analysis across government departments. Has that been done?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will have a look. Let me just have a look whether that is in the actual Health portfolio rather than ours, or whether it crosses over both, member for Araluen. I will check that and part of that briefing I will ...

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, minister. Thanks everyone. We have run out of time.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We have indeed run out of time. Minister, thank you. Thank you to all those officials who have attended with you. I also congratulate you, minister, and member for Araluen, for the manner in which this session has been conducted.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER BURNS' PORTFOLIOS
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILIES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Health and Families.

Dr BURNS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. It is a pleasure to appear before these Estimates Committee hearings in 2008. I would like to introduce the CEO of the Department of Health and Families, Dr David Ashbridge and Peter Beirne, the Chief Operating Officer. From to time others will come up. Everyone should identify themselves when they speak which will help *Hansard*.

The Department of Health and Community Services output budget increased during the 2007-08 financial year from \$837.7m to \$913.7m, an increase of \$76m or 9.07%. This increase during the year was predominantly a result of an increase in Australian government funding negotiated by the department. The department is expected to meet its budget targets for the 2007-08 financial year. The Department of Health and Families budget for 2008-09 is \$915.1m. The Northern Territory government's funding to the department will increase in 2008-09 by \$49.9m, or 8.42%, to \$642.6m.

Indeed, and this is very important, there is increased Northern Territory government expenditure for every output group within my responsibility. The increased NT government funding is offset by a drop of 22.15% in Australian government funding, which is why some output groups have experienced a drop in total funding. As noted earlier in the 2007-08 financial year, the department received significant Australian government funding primarily relating to the Australian government intervention. The Health and Wellbeing Services, and the Public Health output groups in particular, currently show a reduction due to the contraction of Australian government funding from 2007-08 levels.

Currently, the department is negotiating with the Australian government to secure agreement on the level of funding to be provided in 2008-09 for intervention-related programs and services, and for other mutually agreed initiatives. We expect that we will reach agreement shortly. However, because they have not yet been formalised, we are unable to include them in the 2008-09 budget.

Before I highlight some of the key areas of the budget for 2008-09, I would like to reflect on our achievements in 2007-08. An additional \$6m was approved to establish programs under the government initiatives for Closing the Gap of Indigenous Disadvantage. There are 12 additional beds in place at Royal Darwin Hospital; 12 additional beds at Alice Springs hospital and a workplace agreement for medical officers was negotiated with an increase of 7.5% in 2007-08; a further 3% in 2008-09; and a further 4% increase in 2009-10. This ensures our doctors' wages and conditions are competitive the rest of Australia.

On 1 July 2008, the Department of Health and Families will be established. This new department will absorb many of the previous functions of the Department of Health and Community Services and will take on a number of additional functions currently spread across agencies. This consolidation will provide a strong alignment of public sector structure in those important areas. A key feature of the new department is the creation of a new division, NT Families and Children, to address the ongoing needs in the youth, child protection, and family support areas.

Government is committed to the implementation of *Closing the Gap*, a generational plan that addresses indigenous disadvantage across the Territory. This new agency will harmonise a number of government efforts under *Closing the Gap*. The 2008-09 budget papers have been published to reflect this improved departmental structure. Some of the budget initiatives that will enable the continued implementation of building healthier communities in 2008-09 include the Acute Services output increases by \$26.4m in addition to funding for consumer price indexing and wage adjustment. The following new funding is included in this \$26.4m: \$2m to enhance the patient assisted travel scheme; \$2.25m for additional beds at both Royal Darwin and Alice Springs Hospitals, and for expansion of Hospital in the Home program; \$1m to establish renal dialysis satellite facility in Alice Springs; \$280 000 to introduce the community midwifery program in Alice Springs; and \$200 000 to expand allied health services at Alice Springs Hospital.

New funding in Acute Services output is weighted towards Central Australia in the 2008-09 year.

New projects planned to commence in 2008-09 are: \$1.7m for stage3 in fire safety upgrade at Tennant Creek Hospital; and \$1.3m to construct a sobering-up shelter at Tennant Creek. In addition, primary health services to continue to be funded at over 30 remote locations in Central Australia.

Government has also approved \$3m in new capital works projects to commence in 2008-09. There is also approximately \$15.3m of works continuing on existing capital projects in the area. The projects and services planned for the coming year show this government's continuing commitment to Central Australia. The Health and Wellbeing Services output shows a reduction of \$19.6m; this is due to the conclusion in the 2007-08 of time limited Australian government funding for the Australian government intervention. Negotiations for 2008-09 funding are being progressed but are not included in the department budget at this time as I outlined previously.

The 2008-09 budget includes \$1.5m to enhance and expand antenatal and child health programs under the *Closing the Gap* initiative and \$3.5m to fund enhanced services resulting from the disability services review. Public Health Services outputs also show a reduction in 2008-09 due to the inclusion of one-off Northern Territory and Australian government funding in 2007-08. The majority of this drop is due to the payment of \$5.5m one-off capital grant in 2007-08 to the Menzies School of Health Research to expand their facility at Royal Darwin Hospital.

The new department comes into effect on 1 July 2008. Until then, Administrative Arrangements remain unchanged. Therefore, I would be happy to take questions from the committee relating to my current output responsibilities as follows: Acute, Community Health, Environmental Health, Disease Control and Health Research. I shall also take questions on overall departmental staffing and human resources and public education expenditure.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I invite questions from the committee relating to the minister's opening statement.

Mr CONLAN: I have some questions about the oncology unit. Can I ask those now or ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Only if it is directly relating to the opening statement.

Dr BURNS: I do not think I mentioned the oncology unit. My information is that the oncology unit is under Output Group 2.0, Acute Services, Output 2.1, Admitted Patient Services. I am more than happy to take those questions then or whenever the Chair determines.

Mr CONLAN: All right. We will leave those for Output 2.1.

Minister, you mentioned PATS, interstate patient trips for PATS. Can you let me know how many for radiation oncology services have been sent interstate?

Dr BURNS: I would have to take advice on that. My recollection is it is currently about 450-odd patients per annum, or thereabouts, who go interstate for radiation oncology treatment. I will defer to the Chief Executive Officer, Dr Ashbridge. You want the exact number? We will take that on notice and try to get that information back to you.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Sorry. Could I just clarify, minister? That is for the whole of the Northern Territory, patients going interstate for radiation oncology?

Mr CONLAN: The whole of the Northern Territory.

Question on Notice No 5.1

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purposes of *Hansard* would you please restate your question?

Mr CONLAN: How many for radiation oncology services have been sent interstate for the whole of the Northern Territory?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate the question No 5.1.

Dr BURNS: Hopefully, Madam Deputy Chair, by the time we get to Output 2.1, I will have an answer to the member for Greatorex's question.

Mr CONLAN: How many of those go to Adelaide, minister?

Dr BURNS: The majority of those do go to Adelaide but, once again, we will get a definite breakdown. There are some who go to other interstate centres, but that is based on the specialised treatment they require. I can tell you the bulk of those do go to Adelaide. We will get exact numbers for you when we come to Output 2.1.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, can you let the committee know what the cost of the average PATS trip is, broken down cost by cost?

Dr BURNS: It depends specifically what you are asking, member for Greatorex. There is a cost in terms of the airfare; there is a cost in terms of the PATS and the accommodation. There is also a cost in the delivery of the service, the procedure and treatment they undergo when they go to hospital. Did you want to be a little more specific?

Mr CONLAN: I am looking for an average. Surely you have an average, would you?

Dr BURNS: Including all those elements?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Dr BURNS: The CEO, Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: You are limiting that question to radiation oncology, or general PATS?

Mr CONLAN: To general PATS.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Do you want us to include the cross-border charges for hospital admissions interstate in that analysis?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, thank you.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The challenge we have is that we can provide the data quite readily on the administrative components. The cost per admission, which is the reason I asked the question, depends on the length of admission, and the nature of admission. There are highly individualised costs associated with that. That would be a substantial exercise to do. We can do the administrative component, the travel and accommodation, etcetera, quite readily, but the costs of the specific nature of treatment are patient dependent.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. So you are saying there is a lot of work involved in actually providing that answer?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: What I am saying is that there are two answers here. One of them is around the administrative costs, which we can generate quite quickly; the other one is an aggregation of large numbers of patients who have gone interstate who have individualised costs attached to their service.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. My question was: what is the cost of the average Patient Assistance Travel Scheme trip?

Dr BURNS: Is this across all categories of patient including cardiology patients?

Mr CONLAN: Right across the Northern Territory in all categories. Just the average cost of a PATS trip.

Dr BURNS: We believe we can give that answer during the estimates session, but I am willing to take that question on notice, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: I have to say, minister, I am surprised you do not know considering you have just increased PATS. I thought you would have some idea ...

Question on Notice No 5.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question?

Mr CONLAN: What is the average cost of a Patient Assistance Travel Scheme trip?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am, Madam Deputy Chair, but just to add to the member for Greatorex's question. He asked a very open ended question, which I asked him to specify, which included the actual cost of treatment and cross-border transfers which, as the CEO said, is a very complex exercise. We have come down to a specific question which we have undertaken to give a specific answer to.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.2.

Dr BURNS: The CEO has just asked me to clarify that this is for interstate PATS, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, it is.

Dr BURNS: Yes. Okay, that is another specific part of the question. Could that be included in that question, please, Madam Deputy Chair?

Question on Notice No 5.2

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purposes of *Hansard*, could you please restate your question, including that specific?

Mr CONLAN: The question was pretty self-explanatory. What is the cost of the average PATS, Patients Assistance Travel Scheme, trip?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Interstate?

Mr CONLAN: Interstate trip, yes.

Dr BURNS: Interstate. Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So we restate that for the purpose of the *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.2.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, if you could also provide the intrastate cost.

Dr BURNS: We will endeavour to do that.

Mr CONLAN: Can we put that on notice?

Dr BURNS: Of course, you can.

Mr CONLAN: All right.

Question on Notice No 5.3

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purpose of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, can we have the cost of the intrastate travel.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: This is the average cost per patient, you are asking?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Dr BURNS: Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.3.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, how many patients travelled from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to Adelaide for radiation oncology services in 2007-08?

Dr BURNS: We will take that on notice. We have discussed that in the public forum from time to time. I believe there are fewer than 100. We will ascertain those numbers.

Question on Notice No 5.4

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purpose of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question.

Mr CONLAN: How many patients travelled from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek for radiation oncology services to Adelaide?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.4.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Two reports were issued by Frommer – one in July 2004 and the other in August 2004. What is the difference between these two reports?

Dr BURNS: I am prepared to discuss that now, member for Greatorex. However, we are getting many specific questions about radiation oncology that would be better dealt with under Output 2.1, which is where it stays. I do not believe I mentioned radiation oncology in my opening statement. However, I am more than happy but it would be proper for us to deal with radiation oncology then. Then, I will be able to, hopefully, give you some answers on the questions on notice that you have placed before the committee.

Mr CONLAN: All right then.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are on the opening statement at the moment; we will get to that.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, no further questions on the opening statement.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – ACUTE SERVICES Output 2.1 – Admitted Patient Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 2.0, Acute Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: In Admitted Patient Services?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No, we are at 2.0 first.

Dr BURNS: Madam Speaker, if I could just intercede here. I am prepared to answer a whole range of questions on Corporate Services which, I believe, the Deputy Chief Minister alluded to in her opening statement - basically, questions about advertising, cleaning, certificates of exemption and those sorts of questions. I would not want for us to jump over those and the opposition not be given an opportunity to ask questions on these very important issues.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, so Output Group 2.0 and Output 2.1.

Ms CARNEY: Output Group 2.0 is the one?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, and Output 2.1.

Ms CARNEY: No, just Output Group 2.0 for the generic questions.

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, the Deputy Chief Minister, in her opening statement, said I would take the questions on Corporate Services. It is a very large department and I want to give the opportunity to all members of the committee to ask important questions about that.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, how many executives work for the department - that is both executive contract and non-contract positions? How many of those executives have personal assistants? How many of those have executive assistants, executive information coordinators and administrative assistants? Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles?

Dr BURNS: There is an executive structure and a divisional structure within the department, and the budget papers are organised along these lines. I will defer to the CEO and also Mr Peter Beirne on this particular issue. I believe he is prepared to answer those.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Dr David Ashbridge, Chief Executive Officer. Can I clarify which executive positions you are after? I presume you are excluding medical officers who are on executive contract, or are you including them?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, we will have both, please.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I can give it by gender split as well, but in total, there are 79.37 FTEs; 67.16 on executive, and 12.21 on medical executive.

Mr CONLAN: Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Apart from myself, and I have two, I believe every executive officer has one, and they are often shared.

Mr CONLAN: How many staff in the department are still members of NTGPASS or Commonwealth Superannuation?

Mr BEIRNE: Peter Beirne, Chief Operations Officer. The department does not distinguish between either of those super schemes or any super scheme and we do not hold that.

Mr CONLAN: So, you are obviously unsure?

Mr BEIRNE: No, we do not hold that information.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Minister, we understand the executive contract officers have private use of vehicles as part of their contract provision. They pay a contribution for this. How many other staff are able to have their vehicle home garaged, or able to use it for private use? What is the rationale for each, and what is the FBT cost of that?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO on this, member for Greatorex.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The number of vehicles which sit outside the executive contract officer arrangement and which are home garaged is 12. I am looking for the FBT cost of that. We do not have that at hand, but we would be able to provide that for you if you want that.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, please.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, are these questions specific to Output 2.1?

Mr CONLAN: No, these are the generic corporate questions the minister was prepared to answer.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions, is that right?

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Minister, again on vehicles, how many traffic incidents or traffic accidents were department vehicles involved in? Was alcohol or not wearing a seatbelt a factor in any of those? If so, what action has been taken?

Dr BURNS: That is a very detailed question, member for Greatorex, nonetheless important. I will defer to the CEO and Mr Beirne on that.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: In 2007-08, there were 129 traffic accidents. To the best of my knowledge, I am not aware of any involving alcohol or seatbelts. The breakdown is 45 in Darwin; 12 in Gove; 16 in Katherine; 11 in Tennant Creek; 55 in Alice Springs; and nil for Royal Darwin Hospital vehicles.

Mr CONLAN: Do you have a breakdown of the cause of those incidents at all?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: No, I do not. There is obviously an incident report put in against all those accidents. That is standard practice. They have not been collated. I have just given you the overarching number.

Mr CONLAN: If someone had an accident as a result of the influence of alcohol would the department know about that?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Yes, we would be aware of that.

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask again: why then is there no breakdown of specific incidents or accidents?

Dr BURNS: Can I just intercede here, Madam Deputy Chair. There is a mountain of work that goes into estimates questions and given the fact that this is an agency that spends \$913m per annum, there are probably 913 million questions that could be asked. In preparation for these estimates, the public servants, and I commend them for their hard work, try to cover as much as they can about what might be expected in terms of questions. You are asking very valid questions here, but I do not think it is right to criticise the fact these are not readily available.

You have other avenues, member for Greatorex. You can write to me on issues that require some time to find an answer; you can ask questions on the floor of the parliament; you also have the right to ask estimates questions which you are doing. I just ask you to just bear in mind there is an incredible amount of work that goes into these papers and just because they do not contain, or they do not have at their fingertips, the very specific information you want, is no reason to be critical.

Mr CONLAN: First of all, I was not being critical, minister. I was just asking why those figures are not available. If a vehicle is involved in an accident as a result of alcohol, then obviously the department is aware of that because the CEO said yes he is. Where is the data? If the department is aware of it, surely there would be some data? It is a very simple question.

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO.

Mr CONLAN: It is a very simple question, minister, and certainly not critical.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The simple answer is there were 129 accidents and none of them involved alcohol.

Dr BURNS: That is what we have been advised, member for Greatorex. Thank you to the public servants for getting that information to us very rapidly.

Mr CONLAN: How many speeding infringements were issued to departmental staff, minister?

Dr BURNS: Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: In the year, 91.

Mr CONLAN: There were 91. I would just like to move on to consultancies. Minister, can you provide a list of consultancies that were engaged during the course of 2007-08?

Dr BURNS: Yes, very pleased to do so, and I am more than happy to table that document.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you.

Dr BURNS: This will be consultancies over \$10 000. It excludes medical contracts and what is known as EAS, the Employee Assistance Service, which gives counselling and other support to employees. I am very happy to table this information. However, if he has any questions about it I am going to have to borrow a copy from someone else.

Mr CONLAN: I have one question for you on that. How many ended up more expensive than the initial costing due to the variations and who approved those variations?

Dr BURNS: As you know, member for Greatorex, the government has a tender process and that goes through a procurement process. That is handled, I believe, through the member for Millner who is the minister for DCIS. They handle all those tender processes. There will occur, from time to time, instances where the costs of a completed job are increased over the originally quoted figure but there are longstanding processes that precede this government about dealing with those particular issues. I will defer to Dr Ashbridge or Mr Beirne on this issue as it relates to the Health Department.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: My understanding is that whenever we have gone into a changed arrangement, it is a new contractual arrangement dealing with what we paid, contracted for and what we sought, as well as covering we have not paid over what was requested. Where the scope of contract has changed and there has been a new contract drawn up, we have worked within the parameters of that contract.

Mr CONLAN: And who approves those variations?

Dr BURNS: That is the purview of the CEO. Within the official tender process of government - the CEO might remind me of the specifics of this - there are certain bands of contracts that can go out where quotes are sought and then between another band of costs, the process is a tender process. If it is a really large enterprise, it will go actually to Cabinet. There are a whole range of processes and these levels are set by government policy, by this government, just as they were set by the previous government. Could you respond please, Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The details of the contracting levels, the delegations range from people who have the capacity to deal with up to \$10 000; I personally have delegation up to \$50 000; and then it goes to the minister and Cabinet. I think above \$250 000 it goes to Cabinet.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. I want to turn to advertising. What is the cost of advertising in the Department of Health?

Dr BURNS: We are more than happy to table information about that, too. I will defer to the CEO to give some statements about that and then table the document.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: \$355 698.

Mr CONLAN: \$355 698.

Dr BURNS: As you will see in the tabled document, much of that is for Quit and Alcohol and Other Drug programs, BreastScreen and cervical screening promotion, Be Active promotion, death notices, environmental health warnings and alerts, mosquitoes, foster care, sexual health advertising, community service announcements, and fireworks. Of course, we give awards and recognition, and electronic health promotions. That is the total expenditure within the department. They are the broad categories. Recruitment is a major enterprise, too. I am more than happy to table this, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, does the minister's office contain a Departmental Liaison Officer?

Dr BURNS: It does contain a Departmental Liaison Officer just as other ministerial offices do, and just as when the CLP was in government, there were ministerial liaison officers. They provide a very important conduit between ministerial officers and the department. They perform no political duties, nor are they involved in anything political. They are a conduit. Say, for example, there is a request for information. The Departmental Liaison Officer, because of their broad knowledge of the department, will assess that information and bring it back. The Departmental Liaison Officers are also involved in liaising with the department and the departmental executive about legislation that is coming through, Cabinet papers, and papers for the Legislative Assembly. They perform a whole range of very useful tasks. The usual practice is for them to be rotated during various periods to give other people an opportunity to work in a ministerial office, and also to ensure no one is sort of labelled as being political.

Mr CONLAN: At what level are they employed, minister?

Dr BURNS: I am not sure. I will defer to the CEO for that question.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: People move into that position at the level they were in the department. The range is usually in the AO6 to the AO8 range. It is an 'at level' placement.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, the tabled document about expenditure of advertising you said was \$335 695. Does that have a breakdown of radio, newspaper and television, and letterbox?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO, Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: No, it does not have that split. Specifically, you asked about mail-outs. There were no mail-outs in 2007-08.

Mr CONLAN: Can I get a breakdown of television, newspaper and radio advertising spent by the department?

Dr BURNS: We will take that on notice, member for Greatorex.

Question on Notice No 5.5

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question.

Mr CONLAN: Could the department please provide a breakdown of advertising on radio, television and newspaper.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.5.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, how many reviews or audits were put in place due to breaches of discipline in 2007-08?

Dr BURNS: The question, as I recall it, is you asked how many incidents of breaches of discipline within the department occurred within the last financial year. Was that it?

Mr CONLAN: No, the question was how many reviews or audits were put into place as a result of breaches of discipline?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Can I seek clarification? You used the words 'audit' and 'breaches of discipline' in the same question?

Mr CONLAN: How many reviews or audits were put into place due to breaches of discipline in 2007-08?

Dr BURNS: So audits ...

Mr BEIRNE: There were two audits undertaken as a result of suspected fraud during the 2007-08 year.

Mr CONLAN: Can you provide details of that to this committee?

Dr BURNS: I am advised that at least one of these investigations is ongoing, so I am not sure whether it would be appropriate to give details. Mr Beirne, was the other one concluded? Do you just want to give an overview of that, please?

Mr BEIRNE: There was one audit undertaken by Mr Elliott Costello, of Global Resource Management Group. That was in relation to suspected fraud. The audit cost for the department was \$7920. Recommendations on approving the use of statutory declarations, developing procedures for cash management, and maintaining a register of clients assets were made, which have now been implemented by the department.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Beirne. I just want to turn to assets, minister. Were any of your department's premises subject to a police investigation during the financial year 2007-08?

Dr BURNS: That is an open-ended question, I suppose. If you look at Casuarina Plaza, there could be some activities that occur in the public areas of that plaza, or in and around that plaza, which are not directly related to the Health department. That is probably hard to ascertain. Are you talking about break-ins to Health department facilities?

Mr CONLAN: Just to police investigations, open-ended as it may be, yes or no.

Dr BURNS: But that could also include - and I am not trying to be evasive here, member for Greatorex - the police wanting to question someone who may have witnessed a crime out of hours. It is a very open-ended question.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, what about the abuse of IT equipment, particularly the Internet?

Dr BURNS: That is a very good question, because we know, under the intervention, that minister Brough wanted an audit of government IT to ensure none of it was being used for accessing pornography. That is a good question. I ask Dr Ashbridge to give an answer to it, please.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: There were three investigations into IT abuse in the period 2007-08: one admitted and one alleged case of inappropriate use of an employee's official e-mail account. Neither involved inappropriate accessing of explicit material on a website. There was one case of admitted inappropriate accessing of explicit material on a website.

Mr CONLAN: That one alleged - you said there were three, and one was alleged.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: That is correct.

Mr CONLAN: What was the result of that allegation?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: My understanding is it is still ongoing.

Mr CONLAN: While we are on assets, were any assets written-off in departmental offices as a result of police investigations or criminal activity, break-ins?

Dr BURNS: Do you mean the scenario, where there is a break-in, equipment is destroyed and has to be written off? That sort of scenario?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Dr BURNS: We are seeking advice, member for Greatorex. We will need to take that question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.6

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, please restate the question.

Mr CONLAN: I will rephrase that. Has any equipment in departmental offices been written off as a result of criminal break-ins?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocation that question No 5.6.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I now turn to travel. How much did the department spend on travel last year, and are you able to provide a full breakdown of trips taken and for what reason?

Dr BURNS: Member for Greatorex, I am prepared to table the document I have in relation to travel. Obviously, there is a variety of travel: intra-Territory, interstate and overseas. There has been an increase in the travel budget within the department, mainly related to the Commonwealth intervention. I am sure Dr Ashbridge or Mr Beirne may have something to add to what I have said. As well as that, there has been the roll-out of remote renal dialysis, which was funded by OATSIH, the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, development of the cancer care network across the Territory, and the regional remote renal palliative care project engaging communities in regard to end of life planning. As you have been aware, with the incoming federal government and the new National Health Agreement around hospitals and hospital funding, there has been a reform agenda and there has been some increased travel associated with that.

I can table this document, which shows: intra-Territory travel in 2007-08 as at 18 May was \$1.8m approximately; the same period in 2007-08 was \$2.4m; interstate was approximately \$800 000 in 2007, that has risen to \$1.2m in 2007-08; and overseas, there has been an increase in overseas travel as well. I am more than happy to table this document as well, member for Greatorex. I am not sure whether the CEO has anything to add.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: No. I want to clarify: you are talking about staff travel here, not patient travel?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, staff travel. What factors are taken into account when selecting accommodation, either intrastate or interstate for staff travel?

Dr BURNS: Member for Greatorex, as you know, across government there are guidelines for travel, both in terms of the class of travel, if you like, or where people sit on the aeroplane, and for travel allowance. That is not set necessarily within this portfolio. It probably comes under the OCPE for those sorts of guidelines. That applies right across the public service.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Madam Deputy Chair, I have no more Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions.

Mrs MILLER: I have one, but I am not sure if it is non-specific. I wanted to talk to the minister about the wallaby cull in Katherine.

Dr BURNS: I know it is in another area. It is under Output 2.1. I believe we are coming to that, or it could be Output 2.2.

Mrs MILLER: I will wait.

Dr BURNS: I have some information and an update. Actually, I received a letter today, which I am also prepared to table, from the Defence minister on this particular issue, member for Katherine.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I now call for questions on Output 2.1.

Mr CONLAN: Can I just, Madam Deputy Chair, clarify if oncology was coming under 2.1?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. On 5 June 2008, Mr Tony Kingdon, the First Assistant Secretary of the Medical Benefits Division, told the Commonwealth estimates, and I quote: 'I would like to believe that the process was not problematic'. He said the fact that there was no suitable tenderer was 'unfortunate'. Do you think that is a fair assessment of the ...

Dr BURNS: No, I do not, member for Greatorex. I think that is a ridiculous statement and it is a 'Humphrey' statement.

To say a process which has failed and teetered twice and has not been able to be completed is suitable, is patent nonsense. Particularly given the fact since the Northern Territory government has been allocated the funds by the federal government, with an extra \$6m on top of what the previous federal government was offering or had on the table, plus the flexibility for the Northern Territory government to negotiate with a preferred tenderer, with whom we have made substantial progress, I think that statement is foolish.

It is obvious to me that one of the major sticking points in terms of the tender falling over twice was: the unrealistic expectation of the previous federal government that the proponent should not only deliver the specialist medical services but they should also scope, design and construct the building.

What we have done is take that money. We are having a separate process, and the tender has already been advertised yesterday. I have a copy of that tender here which I am prepared to table. A tender advertised yesterday for people, for builders and the like, to come in and scope, design and construct this building. Alongside that process, as I have said publicly, Mr Paul Tyrrell is negotiating with the preferred tenderer. He is very confident of reaching agreement with them within the next six to eight weeks.

I forget the person's name in Canberra; I will call him Sir Humphrey. I think that is a Sir Humphrey statement. It is patently ridiculous and I would not even give it the time of day.

Mr CONLAN: His name is Mr Tony Kingdon.

Dr BURNS: Well, poor old Tony Kingdon.

Members interjecting.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you have always been very quick to blame the previous government for the process of the oncology unit. You did sign up with minister Abbott, so would it not go hand-in-hand that if it was his error, it has also been your error as well?

Dr BURNS: That is a good question because the tender process was always in the hands of the federal government. We signed an MOU with the previous federal government. I signed it with Tony Abbott. The Northern Territory government's obligations within that memorandum of understanding were to provide allied health professional support to cancer sufferers as an adjunct to the radiation oncology unit. Our other responsibility was to give support services around accommodation and support that. That was our role.

The clearly defined role of the previous federal government, and Tony Abbott in particular, was to go out to tender for the service and the construction of the radiation oncology unit. As such, the Northern Territory government did not have a say both in the framing and the progress of that tender. The responsibility was always the federal government's and Tony Abbott's; that was specified under a legally binding MOU. Basically, it has now come to light the reasons, as I outlined before, why the tender process failed, not just once, but twice.

The question I keep on asking, member for Greatorex, the information I have, indicates the second tender process had all but failed during the previous federal election. Yet, we had David Tollner coming out with statements like he had 'already delivered on the radiation oncology unit'. That is a question that still has not been answered.

Mr CONLAN: Just like this question that you are not answering here. Therefore, his error is also your error. I am saying ...

Dr BURNS: I am saying very clearly that Tony Abbott, under the MOU, had clear responsibilities and his responsibility was for the tender process. We had no responsibility at all for that tender process, and our responsibilities were as I have outlined to you.

The previous federal government and its agents need to take responsibility for what they need to take responsibility for: two failed tender processes. I will take responsibility for the processes that are going on now, both in terms of the tender that has gone out - and I have tendered that document here - for the design and construction of that building. I will take responsibility for coming to agreement with the proponents and the negotiations there. I will take responsibility for what I have to take responsibility for.

Mr CONLAN: I will take that as a 'yes' then, minister. You have announced a tender for construction, minister, but ...

Dr BURNS: Separate tender.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, but you still do not know who you are going to put in it. Is that not sort of putting the cart before the horse?

Dr BURNS: No, no ...

Mr CONLAN: How do you know what sort of service providers you will have, what their needs are going to be?

Dr BURNS: I have put on the public record that we are negotiating with a preferred proponent. What I have said on the public record is that I am not at liberty at this stage to name that preferred proponent. What I have said publicly is this preferred proponent is a very well known and well respected specialist unit which delivers radiation oncology services of a very well respected nature. They are very accomplished and well respected. The time will come when that proponent is named. I am not at liberty today to name that proponent but it is a preferred proponent.

Mr CONLAN: So are you saying you have a tender and you have a service provider in mind?

Dr BURNS: It is more than in mind. There are very detailed negotiations going on and have been going on between Mr Paul Tyrrell and Professor Michael Barton, and other public servants, with a preferred tenderer. I made an announcement about two weeks ago and a media release. I think I have it here; I will just see if I - I am not sure whether you saw it, but I made public statements on this issue. I said very clearly in my media release, and also in the media that I did around this issue, it is a joint announcement by me and Nicola Roxon on this issue. I said: 'The progress includes the identification of a well respected service provider to operate the Radiation Oncology Unit. Our expert team is now negotiating directly with this provider'. I am more than happy to table to what I have here. I have been very clear that we are in very detailed negotiations with a preferred provider.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, these people who are tendering for the building, do they know who the service provider is going to be? Do they know what their needs are?

Dr BURNS: There have been a number of regional radiation oncology units constructed around Australia. The parameters for the layout and the set-up of these particular units are fairly standard. Nonetheless, we are expecting, as I said, to come to agreement with a preferred tenderer within the next six weeks or so. If there are particular needs of a preferred tenderer, a preferred proponent, they will be fed into this process.

Mr CONLAN: What is the time line ...

Dr BURNS: The CEO wishes to elaborate further.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The documentation regarding the building, the shape and look of the building, etcetera, is in the public domain. It is within the tender document, so it is readily available. The proponents will be able to look at that as part of ...

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask you to table that one.

Dr BURNS: We will table it.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister.

Dr BURNS: And no doubt in the detailed discussions had by Mr Tyrrell, who is very experienced – he is an engineer by trade, he certainly came up through the ranks of the public service, been involved in the construction of many great projects in the Territory - no doubt he has had some discussions with them about their requirements.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, do you have a time line for the oncology program from the federal Health minister?

Dr BURNS: As I have said, the federal government has allocated the Northern Territory \$19m up-front for this project, which is \$6m more than Tony Abbott was able to put, or willing to put, on the table up-front. The federal Health minister, Nicola Roxon, has also given the Northern Territory the capacity, as I said, to directly negotiate with a preferred provider on the provision of the service. Basically, the Territory has the destiny of this project in our own hands, which is quite good. We are making good progress on it.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, what date do you envisage the first cancer patient to be able to get treatment at the Darwin oncology unit?

Dr BURNS: Member for Greatorex, I will answer that question directly - and I have said this publicly. The proposed time line is towards the end of 2009. The time line is to begin construction, hopefully, at the end of 2008 or the beginning of 2009, with construction and installation of the linear accelerators to be complete by October/November 2009, and for the services to patients to begin at that stage, also. What we are doing is having a parallel process. One is the construction of the radiation oncology unit and the installation of the linear accelerators. The other one is in relation to the service. That is the undertaking I have given.

If we come back to our old mate, David Tollner. He actually made a number of public statements that the radiation oncology unit would be operating - he said on radio on 29 March 2007:

We should see construction start in the Dry Season this year ... everything could be fully completed by the end of this year.

In 2007, he was talking about it all being complete in 2007. We know now that was not the case. There were two tender processes that had failed and the second one, I believe, failed during the previous federal election. Yet, David Tollner - I have one of his election glossies here - talked about - I would like to table this, Madam Deputy Chair – as if it had already been delivered. He said: 'Delivered, a new RDH unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital'. I think he was trying to say a radiation oncology unit. He has a whole section here, saying it was already delivered, which was a little misleading particularly since he probably knew that the whole thing ...

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair! I asked a very simple question: what date do you see the first patient?

Dr BURNS: I have answered that question.

Mr CONLAN: I must have missed something because I did not hear a date.

Dr BURNS: I said the facility is to be completed by October 2009, and patients to be treated as soon as possible after that.

Mr CONLAN: That is sufficient answer, thank you. Minister, we do not need to hear about Dave Tollner or anything.

Dr BURNS: Well, David Tollner still makes a lot of noise about this with Nigel Scullion, and they have a bit to answer for.

Ms CARNEY: Madam Deputy Chair, can I ask the minister to give my colleague a fair go. Can you just save it for, maybe, later if you are forced to go on and on and make mischief? Just let him answer the question.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There is no point of order. Are there any further questions?

Mr CONLAN: Certainly. Minister, on 5 June, your friend, Sir Humphrey, or Mr Tony Kingdon, the First Assistant Director of the Medical Benefits Division - so he is no slouch despite what you might think of

him - told the Commonwealth estimates that it will take at least three years to build an oncology unit. Even if there is a successful tenderer, as you say we are very close to, and there will be an extra \$5m from the federal government, it will not be operational until 2011.

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, the member for Greatorex continues to be negative about a very important service for Territorians, which has been delayed longer ...

Mr CONLAN: By seven years - seven long years.

Dr BURNS: That is right. I have given an undertaking, as minister - and I gave it publicly on a number of occasions - that I am working hard to bring this radiation oncology unit project to fruition, and I will continue to do that. In relation to Mr Tony Kingdon, I will say this: the tender process failed twice under the Commonwealth. We are going to make a success of it, I believe, and I will take great pleasure in inviting Mr Kingdon to come to the opening.

Mr CONLAN: I am glad to see that you have admitted there has been a delay and, by virtue, admitting that it, essentially, is a broken promise which was delivered by the then Opposition Leader, the member for Fannie Bay, in 2001. If this is operational, as you say, by 2010, its first patients, I believe 4500 Territorians will have been diagnosed with cancer.

Dr BURNS: Member for Greatorex, I have acknowledged this project has taken too long. However, I believe it is highly politicised. When you look at it, both sides have given undertakings, both the Northern Territory government and the previous federal government. What we have to do for the benefit of Territorians is get on and do it, build it and get it operational. That is what I am focused on.

Mr CONLAN: I move to separation rates. Separation rates have increased beyond population growth in the Northern Territory.

Dr BURNS: These are hospital separations?

Mr CONLAN: That is right. Does this mean we are, essentially, getting a lot less healthy, as Territorians?

Dr BURNS: There is no doubt that our hospital system, in many ways, is presented with challenges, from the Emergency Department right through to our surgical and medical wards. We are dealing with a unique situation in the Northern Territory. There is no doubt many of those separations are indigenous people who tend to have co-morbidities, for a whole range of reasons, and tend to be sicker than the rest of the Territory population and, indeed, the rest of the Australian population. There are many reasons for that, not least of all the conditions in which people live.

That is why we are keen as a government to implement, and we are implementing our *Closing the Gap* policy. We have funded that, and we are keen to work with the Australian government on their objectives as well, so there are many ways to address this issue. One is to invest more into primary health care. I commend the previous federal Health minister, Tony Abbott, who pledged a substantial amount of money, approximately \$100m over two years, to bolster primary health services throughout the Territory in the remote areas. There are educational issues, the accommodation issues and, as I said previously, almost \$700m from the federal government, with the Territory government putting in approximately another \$100m. The causes of the increased pressures on our hospital manifold are complex, but as a government, we are moving to address those issues. Dr Ashbridge may have something to add to my statement.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I want to make two points. The second one I will defer to Mr Peter Campos to follow up on. I want to rebut the point that we are getting unhealthier. The evidence does not support the comment that the Northern Territory is becoming an unhealthier place to live. There is significant evidence around the length of life of Aboriginal women, and they are living longer, etcetera. I just want to put on the record that the population is not getting sicker, in fact, the population is improving in its health status. There was a subsequent connection you made in that regarding separation rates, which I will ask Peter Campos to answer.

Mr CAMPOS: Peter Campos, Assistant Secretary, Acute Care. If I could give you the time series in terms of the growth in separations, and the difference between overnight and day only. In 2001, the sum of the overnight separations for all the hospitals was 36 685 and, by the end of last financial year, they had grown by 15% over those six years to 42 300. In terms of day-only admissions, in 2001-02 there were

34 870. Last financial year there were 52 720. So the day admissions have grown by 51%. That is where our growth has been. That would predominantly be in relation to renal dialysis.

Mr CONLAN: Would you mind tabling that document there?

Dr BURNS: Yes, please table that, Mr Campos.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you for that. Mr Campos said that dialysis treatment is increasing beyond expectations. What has been the cost of delivery of dialysis treatment over the past five years on a year by year basis? What are the expected projections of renal dialysis and haemodialysis, and what testing has been done on creatine levels in the community?

Dr BURNS: This is a very important question, member for Greatorex. There is no doubt renal dialysis services, and those patients on end stage renal disease, have been growing with time. This has been the trend for at least the last 10 to 15 years. As a government, and I have said this in the Chamber, we decided we would have satellite renal dialysis facilities throughout the Territory. We have established them in Tennant Creek and a whole range of locations across the Territory. The patients that are coming through now on to end stage renal disease, the genesis of their disease would be probably 20 years ago. We are seeing ill health that began 20 years ago. There are substantial costs and this government has made substantial extra investments in renal services, I believe, in the 2007-08 budget of an additional \$1m; and preceding that, over a five year period, substantial amounts of investment. I defer to Mr Campos or Dr Ashbridge to elaborate further.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: It is important to frame this question around the holistic approach to renal disease. If we go through the range of interventions and where we are likely to make a difference with renal disease we should first start with the prevention primary health care centre. The minister mentioned just a short while ago, an additional \$50m a year for primary health care services going into the Northern Territory which will substantially enhance the quality of care, both in terms of prevention and managing people who have early renal disease. In addition, there has been an additional 12 public health nurses focused on renal disease going into the Northern Territory; six funded by the NT government, six by Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. The important dimension I want to get across here is that renal disease is more than just dialysis. If you want to get the total look around the efforts to reduce renal disease then you really need to go to maternal and child health programs, primary health care programs, the whole gamut, and what is codified as renal disease with the extra \$1m is around the Acute Sector component. This is the reason Mr Campos is here and he can take you through the ...

Dr BURNS: Just before Mr Campos speaks, another very important point is to say that when we came to government in 2001, there was quite a large gap between survival rates of NT patients with end stage renal disease and the Australian average. That gap is now closed. Renal patients and renal dialysis patients with end stage renal disease in the Territory have the same survival rate and survival time as patients elsewhere in Australia. That is good for the patients and their families but it also adds significantly to our budget. That is something this government has accommodated and promoted. They are achievements in renal services. I commend Dr Paul Lawton, the other renal physicians and all the renal nurses working in this area. They are very dedicated. You are right: it is very difficult to keep up with the demand but there is money in the budget to expand renal services. I defer to Mr Campos.

Mr CAMPOS: Renal services have received for the last five years a significant investment to make up the gap. It has put us in a situation where we are now at the Australian average for survival rates. In terms of the total cost that is in the budget, two years ago we had \$22m in the budget. Since then we have increased it by \$1.71m, so it would be around about \$24m that is within our budget at the moment to provide renal dialysis services.

Dr BURNS: And with further scoping to look at satellite facilities in some of the remote communities. I am aware Maningrida has some home dialysis facilities - is that correct? - and other locations across the Territory. Rather than having people come into hospital there is the support there in the community for them to have their appropriate dialysis on their community.

Mr CONLAN: Is it fair to say while we have seen advancements in renal dialysis in technology essentially and those with kidney disease living longer as a result of that technology, we are not really seeing a reduction in kidney disease itself? People are living longer; we are not seeing a reduction itself. As a result, what measures are in place to tackle the kids, as Mr Campos said?

Dr BURNS: I see that the CEO is keen to answer this question, but so am I. It is a very important fundamental question you are asking here. We know the genesis of renal disease comes about, and it is thought to come about through repeated infections in childhood. Those infections, it is fairly well determined, come about through overcrowding in housing. That is one element. Another element is what happens *in utero*. So, whether the nutrition of the mother has been adequate *in utero*, whether the mother has smoked while she was pregnant, and then in the early years of the child, what sort of nutrition the child has had and, as I mentioned, repeated infections.

All this dovetails into what we have been talking about with *Closing the Gap* and our work with the Commonwealth government and the previous Commonwealth government in terms of significant extra investment in housing - the genesis of a lot of these skin sores comes back to overcrowding in housing and unhygienic conditions. We have invested in more maternal and child health nurses. I believe there was an extra \$2.1m in terms of maternal, not this budget but the budget before, and also what the CEO mentioned in terms of more investment through funding by the federal government. I will say it again: I congratulate Tony Abbott for securing that extra funding. The challenge for us all now is to convince the current federal government that that should be sustained with time. If we all work together in a bipartisan way, I believe that can happen.

I hope that answers your question. It is not a simple answer, but it comes back to the genesis of these diseases. Possibly, the CEO might have more to add.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The minister gave a very comprehensive response. I would just like to add, in terms of the capital program for the department, the member for Greatorex might be pleased to know we are currently improving renal capable rooms in all new health centre upgrades and new health centres. It is not something which we are surprised about. We are planning for people who are requiring dialysis and we are also balancing that effort with prevention to try to stop people entering that, as well. I am very proud of the efforts that the department has made in managing its renal ...

Dr BURNS: Also in the 2008-09 budget, \$0.5m for more child health workers and also \$1m for increased ante-natal care for indigenous women. The government continues to invest and certainly *Closing the Gap* is our objective.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I acknowledge that the member for Nelson has been replaced by the member for Brainting.

Mr CONLAN: Just finally on that, late presentations, I imagine, would be a major cause for kidney disease?

Dr BURNS: People like Paul Lawton, Wendy Hoy and others were the pioneers in identifying and characterising renal disease within the indigenous population, raising awareness and getting protocols in place about screening. It is part of the protocols for physical checks, which try to catch people at the very early stages for the potential to go onto renal disease. There are a number of drug treatments that can be embarked on to slow the onset of renal disease. However, I am not sure if the CEO wants to elaborate further on that.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: No, I think you have covered it all, minister.

Mr CONLAN: Is there a particular program to address late presentations?

Dr BURNS: There has been a lot of work done over the years in what is called Preventable Chronic Diseases. That was led by Dr Tarun Weeramanthri and others. The Northern Territory led Australia in this regard. As part of the checks that are done within clinics, they are looking for the onset and the genesis of these preventable chronic diseases. We have been very proactive. That work, incidentally, started under the previous government, and I acknowledge their work in that regard. It has certainly been carried on and further supported within this government.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Yes, the commitment to preventable chronic disease in aggregate - be it respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, renal disease - is a significant effort across all the health services of the Northern Territory government, non-government, private, etcetera. There has been a massive improvement in the timeliness of people starting renal dialysis, to specifically answer your question, and that is the major contributor to the improved outcomes around renal dialysis.

Dr BURNS: If I could add to that, one long-standing project within the Territory has been what is called the PCIS project, the Patient Care Information System. That is being rolled out in clinics right across the Territory. That has the capacity about follow-up, about diagnosis, about logging what the tests are in an electronic fashion to make the whole thing a lot more efficient, and actually better, to support the patient and to identify those with chronic disease.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, I would just like to talk about bed block. How many times have patients in the Emergency Department at Royal Darwin Hospital been treated in corridors or ambulances as a result of bed block?

Dr BURNS: Bed block is a major issue for our hospitals. It is important to point out at the outset that our Emergency Departments are three times as busy as Emergency Departments around Australia on average. That is an important element. There have been some instances, as you pointed out in parliament, where ambulances were parked on the ramp at Royal Darwin Hospital. I am advised that was during times of peak demand. However, steps have also been taken that those patients who are in ambulances in such situations are brought inside the Emergency Department. I am not sure whether, first, Dr Ashbridge wants to comment on that and, possibly, Dr Notaras.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I might just have an opening comment. To understand the connections around bed block and where the interventions need to go, clearly, there is a responsibility in the primary care sector in terms of how many general practitioners and how many people are seen and managed outside. There is also a responsibility around the ability to free up discharges, particularly going to the aged care sector. Both of those areas sit outside the domain of responsibility for the Northern Territory government. We clearly have responsibility to look at our processes, efficiencies and resourcing within the acute care sector. That has to do with things like RAPU, numbers of beds, how efficiently we manage patients, and how we triage them. I just wanted, before I hand over to Len, for you to understand the comprehensive nature that is required around managing bed block. It is not just a simple matter of only looking at the acute care sector.

Dr BURNS: There is also the element of opening extra beds at Royal Darwin Hospital. There have been close to 60 extra beds opened up at Royal Darwin Hospital since 2001. There is more to come as part of our election commitment. The Rapid Admission Planning Unit that the CEO mentioned - recurrent spending of some \$7.2m per annum; 24 beds, certainly taking the pressure off the Emergency Department in Royal Darwin Hospital and improving flow through the hospital.

I can say, member for Greatorex, yes, there have been episodes. I am advised there were six to eight episodes in late 2007 and early 2008. All of those episodes where ambulances were ramped were triaged, and all those who were category 1 and 2 were straight into ED. Dr Notaras may have more detail for you and talk about the steps being taken to cope with demand at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Dr NOTARAS: Len Notaras, General Manager, Royal Darwin Hospital. Royal Darwin Hospital is the principal hospital for the Northern Territory, certainly for the Top End. The next nearest hospital to us is the Jakarta General Hospital. I put that in deliberately. We cannot go on bypass, so we must actually treat people.

As the minister has suggested, between six and eight incidents, if I could call it that, or occurrences of ambulances being banked up in the emergency bay occurred in the last financial year, which is incredibly fewer than hospitals the same size in other parts of this country. That said, our triage nurses check the patients when they arrive at the hospital. If they are a category 1, category 2, or even a category 3 that is of some doubt, they are immediately transferred into the relevant resuscitation or other room, so they will not get delayed. Generally, the people who might be delayed would be the less serious cases.

We have looked at patient flow at Royal Darwin Hospital and have been working with some of the leading centres in this country, in fact, the world. We have a state-of-the-art Rapid Assessment Admission Unit, 24 bays. That particular unit is the only purpose-built one in Australia, and quite likely the only purpose-built one in the southern hemisphere. We can be duly proud of that as Territorians.

All of that said, it is one of the busiest emergency departments in this country. If I go back to the estimates before last, we would be talking about a hospital, Royal Darwin, with about 297 beds. Now we are talking about a hospital today with somewhere closer to 343 beds, with that number to increase early in the next financial year.

Mr CONLAN: You say six to eight incidences last year of patients having to be treated in ambulances. Was there some sort of trend or pattern as to why that was happening which could be preventable in the future?

Dr BURNS: As I outlined in my answer, there is increasing demand on Accident and Emergency departments all over Australia. Year on year, on average around Australia, it is somewhere around 8%. As I said previously, we have three times the presentations to our Emergency Department in Royal Darwin Hospital and, indeed, Alice Springs Hospital for that matter, on average compared to the rest of the country. So there is demand. It is demand that cannot be foreseen in many cases. It could be due to a whole range of factors. It is episodic. I commend the staff for the way they deal with this. As I have said, in an effort not to have ambulances ramping at Royal Darwin Hospital, even though all those patients, as Dr Notaras said, are triaged, there is more emphasis to get those patients within the doors of Royal Darwin Hospital and waiting in specific areas. Our ambulance resources are very valuable resources and we need to free them up. I am not sure whether the CEO has anything to add to my answer.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Just to reiterate the point that Dr Notaras made: the average numbers of presentations to the emergency department Australia wide is 223 per 1000 population; and the Northern Territory is running at 705. A close second is New South Wales at 232. Just to reiterate the busy-ness of the hospital, I would make another point which is the assumption that because people arrive by ambulance their triage levels are automatically quite high. That is not necessarily the case. We are in discussion with the ambulance services about different methods of treating people who are not in the serious triage of category to try to free up the ambulance service. I wanted to clarify the assumption of ambulance and urgent; they are not the same thing.

Mr CONLAN: I appreciate that and broadly speaking fair enough. However, in the six to eight incidences where they were brought in by ambulance and they were treated in the back, was the triage situation with these patients quite serious?

Dr BURNS: Dr Notaras and I made that plain. I am advised that with those people in those six to eight incidents all were triaged appropriately. Those that were category 1 or 2, or some 3's where there some doubt as Dr Notaras said, were triaged and immediately brought within the Accident and Emergency department. Those patients were seen. It was not as if they were waiting out there and no one had seen them. It is an issue. I commend the Accident and Emergency staff for the great work they do and the great pressures they work under. They do a great job.

Mr CONLAN: What contingencies might be in place if there was a very serious situation where someone was brought in by ambulance and there were no beds or there was no room in theatre?

Dr BURNS: I can assure Northern Territorians in terms of those patients who need an immediate resuscitation and attention we hit the target 100%. There is no 99%, no 95%. It is 100%. That is the assurance we give. That is our target. That is the national benchmark and we meet that. The Accident and Emergency staff deal with these situations on a daily basis. I commend them for the very difficult situations they deal with. Dr Notaras or Dr Ashbridge may want to respond further to that.

Dr NOTARAS: It is a good question. We have a contingency. The contingency is such that we move into a higher level of response not dissimilar to the response we have when we have President Ramos Horta or the like coming down. We work closely with the Darwin Private Hospital. We decant patients very quickly, particularly out of the resuscitation area. There are five operating rooms, soon to become seven, in Royal Darwin Hospital and there are another five in the Darwin Private Hospital, all of which maintain the flow in urgent cases. No seriously ill patient will knowingly wait. I am the person who ultimately gives permission for the ramping procedure to occur. When that occurs, myself or my Deputy, Jan Evans, makes it our business to be in the emergency department for some time to ensure the flow is maintained.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Notaras. Minister, you mentioned the ambulance service. As a result of this situation over the course of last year where six to eight ambulances were tied up with treating patients as a result of a bed block, was their response delayed? Were they needed to attend an emergency situation and unable to because they were ...?

Dr BURNS: This is a matter for the operational area of the ambulance to determine and I ...

Mr CONLAN: You are the minister, and I am just asking you, minister, whether you might know about that?

Dr BURNS: We fund the ambulance services but the ambulance services are an autonomous body which is St John Ambulance. They make operational decisions about where their ambulances are and what they are going to do. In fact, basically, if they are on a call out and there is a need elsewhere, they can put a patient off and go to the scene of that particular need. These decisions are made within the ambulance service. Dr Ashbridge may want to add to that.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Just to reiterate, the same processes that apply at the Royal Darwin Hospital around contingencies, when you get confronted in that situation, their organisation operates exactly in the same *modus operandi* about how to ensure the sickest are seen quickest. The less sick or the less urgent have a differential approach and that ambulance is released to go to the most urgent cases.

Dr BURNS: Also, government has been increasing funding to St John Ambulance, \$11.5m approximately in 2006-07; \$12.68m in 2007-08; and \$13.62m in 2008-09. So we do recognise the importance of properly resourcing our ambulance service and the great job they do.

Mr CONLAN: With respect, minister, it is the health of Territorians that is at stake if ambulances are tied up as a makeshift bed, if you will, in the Royal Darwin Hospital. The fact that you might not be responsible for it, I do not think is much of an excuse to not know the answer.

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, the member for Greatorex is taking what I said out of context. What I said was that operational decisions are made by St John Ambulance. They will pull their ambulances very quickly to go to the scenes where they are needed. That was the text of my answer. The member for Greatorex is just playing a little with what I said.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? Member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: If I could ask, did the member for Greatorex question about elective waiting lists?

Mr CONLAN: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, elective waiting lists seem to grow and grow for some patients. Could you give us an indication of the numbers of people currently on the elective waiting list in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin, across the region? What is the average waiting list time? What is the procedure that seems to be most urgently needed?

Dr BURNS: I am not sure what data the member for Braitling is basing her assertion that the waiting lists are growing. Last year, there was a significant investment by this government into reducing elective surgery waiting lists, some \$2.3m. Basically there has been a 30% reduction in overall lists for those patients who were overdue. There are Australian Standards about who is overdue and the time people should wait for different categories of elective surgery. In the overdue list there was a 31% decrease, and in the lists overall there was a 16% decrease. In relation to Alice Springs Hospital, I am told that there has been a 30% reduction in elective surgery waiting lists. That would be in the overdue list. Added to this, the federal government has allocated \$5.3m to the Territory to further reduce elective surgery waiting lists. The feedback I have had from patients and surgeons has been very positive. I will acknowledge, however, member for Braitling, that the overdue list was larger in Alice Springs. That is why with the \$5.3m for a variety of reasons, not least of all accessibility of patients and getting patients in, particularly from the remote areas, and that is why the focus of our work with the \$5.3m is for remote patients in general but Alice Springs region, in particular. So, although Alice Springs Hospital did a great job in the number of procedures they did, they started behind, if you like, Royal Darwin Hospital and other hospitals. So, more effort, more resources have been directed at Alice Springs Hospital. In terms of the exact categories of patients who might have been waiting the longest, I might defer to Mr Campos.

Mr CAMPOS: The four main categories where the waiting lists are longest are ENT surgery, orthopaedics, general surgery and ophthalmology. Those are the four categories which have the longest waits.

Mrs BRAHAM: What are the average waiting times?

Mr CAMPOS: That would be different for each one of those.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you give me ...

Mr CAMPOS: I do not have those here but we could ...

Dr BURNS: We will take that question on notice, member for Braitling. It is also important to point out that, apart from the support by the Australian government, I commend the Fred Hollows Foundation in terms of surgery for those people who require elective surgery for eye disease. They are doing a great job in Central Australia, but ...

Mrs BRAHAM: And hearing. They are doing a lot of work there.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: There has been a substantial effort in managing the elective surgery waiting lists across the Northern Territory through a range of different initiatives. A year-and-a-half or so ago we put in about an extra \$1.5m into addressing the elective surgery. The federal government put some additional money in. We are maintaining the effort. Fred Hollows is coming in and doing work in Alice Springs. In addition to all that, we now have a partnership arrangement with John James Memorial Hospital in Canberra which is doing elective surgery procedures in Katherine Hospital. With the combination of all those efforts – NT government, Australian government, Fred Hollows and the intervention as well and the follow-up of those - we are putting a significantly coordinated effort into addressing the elective surgery waiting list.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, what would you suggest ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Sorry, member for Braitling, we will put that question on notice.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I think I got the answer. I just ask the minister: what would you suggest then I say to a constituent who has been waiting six months for elective surgery?

Ms Carney: Tell them to ring Burnsy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Dr BURNS: I do not know the particular case. There are various medical reasons why people may have delays. It may be a medical decision. I cannot really comment on a specific case. However, what I can reiterate is that there has been a significant reduction overall in elective surgery waiting list, particularly for those who are overdue. There are more resources being put in, and I have given an undertaking that more resources will be put in to Alice Springs. If you want to make contact with my office about specifics, I will pass that on to the department and see what we can ascertain in terms of this particular case. It would be wrong of me, as minister, to say: 'Oh well, the member for Braitling mentioned this particular case, we will move them up the list'. What I can do is ask the department to look at the case and see how things can progress.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Perhaps your advice to your constituent might be to talk to their specialist regarding what the reason for that is. You may be aware there are different times for waiting, depending on the category of surgery within 30 days, within three months, within 12 months. They are clinical decisions and they are made by clinicians. We are unable to comment on the specifics of a given case, but understanding the framework, around six months is not necessarily a delay, depending on the clinical nature of the surgery.

Mrs Braham: I will let it go.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions to Output 2.1. That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Non-Admitted Patient Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Non-Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I noticed that on 17 June this year, an article in the *NT News*: 'Territory enters the age of super nurse' ...

Dr BURNS: This is actually the previous output area if you are talking about nurse practitioners.

Mr CONLAN: This is non-admitted patient services, nurse practitioners?

Dr BURNS: In my book I have them under the previous output. I am more than happy to take the question, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: I was under the impression this was 2.2, but thank you, minister. Obviously, this is a reference to the nurse practitioners. I know that you are proud of this step, but do you accept that this has been a Country Liberal Party policy for a long time?

Dr BURNS: I do not make a habit of reading Country Liberal Party policy ...

Mr CONLAN: You have been around long enough to know.

Dr BURNS: I am concerned as Health minister ...

Mr CONLAN: You have been around long enough to know, minister.

Dr BURNS: I know Dr Lim, your predecessor, jumped on the bandwagon at one stage ...

Mr CONLAN: He did, he worked very hard.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Dr BURNS: ... and he introduced a General Business Day bill, which is coming up. However, as I have said on the public record then and I will say now, the work in terms of nurse practitioners actually preceded his bill.

There is significant work to be done. There needs to be amendments to a number of acts including the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act*, the *Natural Death Act* and the *Notifiable Diseases Act*. Apart from the legislative framework changing, there also needs to be accreditation. There are accreditation issues, because if these nurse practitioners are going to be prescribing and administering certain drugs, there needs to be, first, agreement about whether they have had the suitable training to do that and, second, there needs to be a formulary, as it is called, that is published, as we did with optometrists who have been allowed prescribing and treatment rights about exactly what drugs they can prescribe and administer. It is no simple step. There has been quite a lot of work done. In my last meeting with the Australian Nursing Federation, their CEO, Yvonne Falckh, actually commended government on progress and was very satisfied with progress in these very complex areas. So progress is being made, I can assure you of that.

Mr CONLAN: What time frame do you envisage to iron out these bugs, so to speak, so we can get these nurses into the nurse practitioner jobs?

Dr BURNS: The advice in the brief I have here is that the Nurse Practitioner Implementation Steering Group and Implementation Working Groups are meeting and addressing endorsed terms of reference to establish nurse practitioners in the Northern Territory by July 2008. In March 2008, the Northern Territory Nursing and Midwifery Board approved three regulation pathways that will enable registered nurses to be authorised to practice as nurse practitioners, and that includes mutual recognition with other jurisdictions, Masters Nurse Practitioner and portfolio of current education and expertise as a nurse practitioner with sunset clause until 31 March 2009. I mentioned the key pieces of legislation, and also the 2008 nurses EBA negotiations that are considering the employment and classifications within the nurses' career structure for both nurse practitioner and nurse practitioner candidates training positions. Up to 20 nurse practitioner positions are currently being developed or investigated by working groups.

It is a bit more than just introducing legislation into parliament. There is a lot of groundwork that has to be done. I am pleased to say that groundwork has been occurring and the Australian Nursing Federation is very pleased with progress.

Mr CONLAN: If someone goes to a nurse practitioner and receives a script from that nurse practitioner, will they be able to fill that script at a pharmacy?

Dr BURNS: That, of course, comes under the PBS, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. I am not apprised of the prescribing rights of nurses under the PBS. Possibly Dr Ashbridge or Mr Campos may be able to tell us about that. I know dentists have limited prescribing rights.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: My understanding of this issue is that it is a national issue and needs to be sorted out at a national level. You may be aware that there was a discussion yesterday in Canberra regarding the

responsibilities and roles of nurses in the primary care sector, specifically a nurse practitioner. My understanding is that it is something we will need to sort out here. It does require a national approach.

Dr BURNS: Certainly, some MBS items, the Medical Benefits Scheme, do cover treatments in various circumstances by nurses and also, I believe, Aboriginal health workers, but I may stand corrected on that. There is some recognition within the MBS at present and, basically, as Dr Ashbridge said, we need to explore this further.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: In terms of informing the Estimates Committee, there is a nurse who put a letter into the Nursing and Midwifery Board on 11 June of this year for registration as a nurse practitioner. That was granted. The Nursing and Midwifery Board Registrar said this was granted and deemed until 11 July. When granted she had a practicing certificate till 30 September when she can re-apply. The point I am making here is that you asked when it started. I am saying it has started.

Mr CONLAN: I do not think I asked when it started. I think I asked when it will begin.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I am just saying there is a nurse who has been approved already ...

Mr CONLAN: In the Northern Territory? Whereabouts?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I do not know.

Mr CONLAN: So if I go to that nurse and get a script from her, can I fill that script at a pharmacy?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: No, it depends on her area of activity.

Mr CONLAN: Do you know her area of activity is?

Dr BURNS: One of the areas of operation of a nurse practitioner I can see which would be of great benefit to the health structure within the Northern Territory, particularly on remote communities, and already through the CAAPA manual, nurses and Aboriginal health workers would be them having prescribing rights for certain drugs. This takes another step where nurses can be autonomous practitioners particularly in that primary health care setting within our remote clinics. In terms of nurses being able to prescribe and treat, I am not sure where the AMA would be on this particular issue at a national level. I would say, as Dr Ashbridge said, it has been canvassed to the national level. I would say the AMA would have some very strong views on that.

Mr CONLAN: There would have to be some areas of expertise for which you would see a medical practitioner. The benefits, I am led to understand, especially on remote communities is to ease the burden of the shortage of medical practitioners we have in the Northern Territory. So, there had to be some level of expertise you would expect.

Dr BURNS: That is right. In terms of prescribing, the system that exists in most of the remote communities features their own pharmacy and imprest system. Nurses and doctors source the drugs or treatments out of there. There is no MBS script involved at all. Those medications are sourced within the system.

Mr CONLAN: So, can we take a rather common drug like Nexium, for example. Do you envisage that someone could go and get a repeat script from a nurse practitioner for a monthly dose of Nexium?

Dr BURNS: We are joined by Dr Steven Skov, who probably has a lot more detail about the interaction of the MBS, PBS system and nurse practitioners. Are you in a position to address this issue, Dr Skov?

Dr SKOV: Dr Steven Skov, Chief Health Officer. I think I can shed some light on this for you. Currently within the Northern Territory, a great number of nurses are authorised to prescribe medications when they are working for either the Health department or community controlled health services. They have an authority to do so under the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act*. In doing that, they have a formulary which they can prescribe under and those medications are sourced from Health department sources or from within the community-controlled service sector.

There is a difference between that and what might happen in the future possibly where a nurse practitioner might be operating in private practice as a general practitioner does. In that instance, a general practitioner would write a prescription, take to the pharmacy and the federal government might pay for that

under the PBS. Currently, nurse practitioners do not have that right. But that is something the federal government is considering, but that is for sometime in the future.

Mr CONLAN: So, at this stage, through you, minister, we would only see nurse practitioners essentially in remote community health clinics?

Dr BURNS: There might be a variety of settings but, as Dr Skov said, in terms of someone getting a prescription and being able to take it to a pharmacy, that is not going to be occurring unless there is changes to federal policy and legislation. There is no reason within the legislative frameworks I have mentioned here that certain treatments and procedures could be carried on by nurses who are registered nurse practitioners.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, minister.

Ms SACILOTTO: Any further questions?

Mr CONLAN: None for 2.2 for me.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are we doing 2.2?

Dr BURNS: That was 2.1 in my book.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We have crossed off Output 2.1. I accepted that question under Output 2.2. Are there any further questions?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, could you give me an update on the scenario with the wallabies at Tindal Airport which caused Air Med to be relocated to Darwin?

Dr BURNS: Yes, I can, member for Katherine. It is a very important issue. I am just finding the brief as we speak.

As we are aware there was a wallaby strike on a Pearl Aviation plane in August 2007 during a night operation. It was a very serious incident. As I understand it, there had to be an emergency landing at Darwin Airport. Pearl Aviation felt there were ongoing problems with the wallabies at Tindal, and they relocated to Darwin in September 2007. Representations were made by the department to the Defence Department and Tindal to progress a wildlife management plan, which, in simple terms, was a cull of the wallabies, and for a wildlife exclusion fence which is the only way, I am advised, this problem can be solved.

I wrote to minister Fitzgibbon earlier this year, on 8 May. I am prepared to table that letter and I have a reply from minister Fitzgibbon. I will table this letter. That is my letter to the federal minister. This is a very important issue, and minister Fitzgibbon has replied. In essence, the key paragraph is:

The construction of an exclusion fence has received funding and is in the planning stages. Due to the extensive consultation required, it is anticipated that the fence will be completed in December 2008.

What I am saying is that the current arrangements in terms of Air Med evacuations in Katherine will continue until that fence is constructed. I believe all risks have been covered. If a night evacuation is required, I am advised a helicopter will be used for that, otherwise patients will be stabilised in Katherine Hospital.

I understand your concern, as local member, and as local member you have made very strong representations to me and the department and it is a matter of concern. Whilst the Air Force has resumed exercises or night flights in Tindal, my advice is that they have a different sort of aircraft we are hearing through Pitch Black at present, and that noise scares the wallabies. Also, I assume, they have personnel who clear the area before they take off and land.

Pearl Aviation is very strong in their wish for a wildlife exclusion fence before they are willing to run night operations out of Katherine. I am not sure whether the CEO or Mr Campos have additional information.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Two points. One of them is the moment we have clearance, we will be operating out of Katherine - as quickly as we possibly can. Second, in addition to the letter the minister has received from the federal minister, I have also received a bureaucratic letter from the Department of Defence. They are

coming up here in the near future to talk to Pearl Aviation and Mr Peter Campos regarding whether there are any other options about moving them forward. We would like to do anything we can to fast-track our relocation of the service to Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. It will be very reassuring to know that once that wildlife exclusion fence is there they will be flying at night time. The other aspect of the question is: will they be based in Katherine? Will their men be based in Katherine?

Dr BURNS: The answer is an unequivocal yes. Seeing this is such an important issue, an issue you have raised with me personally and in writing, I undertake to try to keep you informed of progress as it occurs. However, I can assure the people of Katherine that adequate measures are being taken regarding emergency evacuations. I commend the department for taking that action.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, this is probably a question more to Dr Len Notaras. Regarding Alice Springs outpatients specialist services, you can normally get an appointment and, when you arrive at the hospital at that time, you can usually see the specialist fairly close to it. In Darwin, apparently, when you turn up for your 9.30 am specialist appointment so do 30 other people because they do not give specific appointment times. I am wondering why, when people are usually there - they have work to go to, and there was an incident the other day when someone arrived at 9.30 am and did not get out of the hospital until 1 pm because they had to wait while all these other people were seen. Is there any reason why Darwin hospital does not, for efficiency purposes, have an interview set time for patients who come to specialist outpatient services?

Dr BURNS: Member for Braitling, it is a good question. I will ask Dr Notaras to respond, please.

Dr NOTARAS: An excellent question, member for Braitling. I suggest that it is to do with the number of people who are presenting and the way in which the clinics are kept reasonably opened for - how shall I put it - people who arrive at short notice with complex conditions. For argument's sake, in orthopaedics you can have somebody come along at short notice and need to be booked in at the very last minute. These particular circumstances are the bane of some of consultants and, indeed, the secretarial staff's existence. They are kept open for the purpose of flow and because of the volumes. We are looking at it, and we will continue to look at it and, hopefully, be able to, for those folk, as you appropriately suggested, are disrupted with work and getting through.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, there is no particular reason why someone cannot be given a set time - you cannot appoint people certain times throughout the morning rather than allow everyone to come at the same time?

Dr NOTARAS: It has been the decision of the senior clinicians themselves - for example, Mr Garrett Hunter and Mr Matthew Sharland, the senior orthopaedic and ENT specialist, to keep the flow open. Again, it is associated in part with the length of the consultations, as well. It is very difficult for them to predict. When people are sent away for X-rays, diagnostic tests or so on, if there was a set time, as in the private sector, it is very difficult to keep those flowing through.

Dr BURNS: Member for Braitling, no doubt, Dr Notaras will relay your question to the clinicians at the Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, for efficiency purposes. Minister, can I then go to the Palmerston Medical Centre?

Dr BURNS: The super clinic?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. When will it open, or is it open now? It is not working 24 hours?

Dr BURNS: There is the Palmerston Health Precinct which exists and, particularly, community health services are delivered through there. If you are referring to the election commitment by the Rudd government - and Kevin Rudd made it himself - around a GP super clinic at Palmerston, I am in discussions with Nicola Roxon about implementing that election promise. I have given an undertaking publicly that I want to see GP services provided out of existing infrastructure out there, which is the Palmerston Health Precinct infrastructure, at the end of this calendar year. That is still the timetable I am working to.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you see it being sustainable to have it opened 24 hours a day? It did not work previously, did it?

Dr BURNS: You are right. The previous CLP government did run a trial at one stage, as I understand it. I believe there has been growth in the Palmerston area. The election commitment is around after hours GP services. We have engaged a consultant who has provided a report to government on various options to go forward. As I said, I have had discussions with Nicola Roxon. The pledge from the federal government was \$10m. That is the discussion I am having with her. We are moving forward in our discussions and I will be meeting with her, I would say, in the next month to further discuss those options and a way forward.

There is a lot of interest from various GP groups about actually setting up such a clinic. I have been approached by a number of groups. I know it is a contentious issue amongst some GPs. I believe the people of Palmerston and the Mayor of Palmerston have indicated very solidly it is something they would like to see. I have given a commitment that I want to see after hours GP services operating out of the existing infrastructure at the end of this calendar year.

Mrs BRAHAM: My next question is from the member for Nelson regarding ambulances. Is Humpty Doo going to get a permanent ambulance service?

Dr BURNS: That is a good question, member for Braitling, on behalf of the member for Nelson. I have mentioned before that we have increased our funding to St John Ambulance service over the past three years. I also mentioned that we have a contract with St John's. It is set out very clearly in those contracts, the sort of triggers required for new ambulances to come on to the road. Either Dr Ashbridge or Mr Campos could answer that question in more detail.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: The contract arrangement we have with St John Ambulance is regularly reviewed as to what service expansion is required and where. Based on those discussions, and looking at the numbers and the workload, we can then put an argument to government around what the service expansion might look like. At this point, the discussions have not gone beyond what the present level of ambulance service delivery is in the Humpty Doo area. We review that on a regular basis and advise government but, at this point in time, we have not moved into an area of moving beyond our current service model.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many ambulances do we have in the Darwin region, and how many would be on call at any one time?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Currently there is one ambulance and crew in each of the following locations, and this is 24/7: Casuarina, Parap and Palmerston. The Joint Emergency Services Communications Centre has an additional ambulance for eight hours, five days a week at Casuarina. In addition to that, there is an ambulance at Nhulunbuy, two at Katherine, two at Tennant Creek have an eight hour Monday to Friday coverage with the after hours services limited to crew availability. In Alice Springs, there are two ambulances and crew 24/7. And one ambulance 24/7 for the Ambulance Communication Centre, with Humpty Doo and Batchelor retaining volunteer services.

Mrs BRAHAM: There has been concern expressed in the past about ambulances going into town camps or hot areas and the danger some of their officers face. What is the government policy about attending emergency calls in places where we know there is violence?

Dr BURNS: The first thing to say is that government has passed legislation that makes it an aggravating offence ...

Mrs BRAHAM: After the event.

Dr BURNS: This is a deterrent to people and people should be aware they need to respect our emergency services workers such as ambulance crews. The ambulance service, I know, works very closely with police. If there is trouble, they ring police and they have an operational relationship with police. I see that as very important. I hope that answers in part your question, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you agree with people who believe, in some cases, that ambulances should not go into these hotspots, which then might cause some quite horrific injuries? It is a dilemma is it not, do you go or not when you know you might get bashed but the patient ...

Dr BURNS: I know ambulance officers like our police and other workers are very courageous people. They make these sorts of decisions on an operational basis. I am sure if there was a threat or a perceived threat they would be calling police and asking police to accompany them.

Mrs BRAHAM: My last question is on Hospital in the Home. Has it commenced in Alice Springs and if so ...

Dr BURNS: There is extra funding for Hospital in the Home in this financial year, but I will defer to Mr Campos in this particular instance.

Mr CAMPOS: Hospital in the Home commenced last financial year in Alice Springs on a trial basis. There was \$190 000 provided to the hospital to assist it to deal with the demand on its services. Rather than having more inpatient beds, the scheme allowed the hospital to cope with people in the community. This year there is \$467 000 as an increase to that to expand that program even further.

Dr BURNS: Overall there has been an injection of an extra \$1.17m to further support Hospital in the Home in Darwin out of Royal Darwin Hospital and now also Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: So it will continue?

Dr BURNS: Absolutely, and we put more funding towards it in Alice Springs.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0. And we are moving on now.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.1

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have answers to questions taken on notice. I am prepared to table these, as well as read them. Question on notice No 5.1, how many radiology oncology patients travel interstate for treatment and how many to Adelaide. The answer is: in total, 424 patients travelled from the NT for oncology treatment interstate. I think that was the approximate number I said in answer to your question, member for Greatorex.

The second part is 290 patients travelled to Adelaide for oncology treatment. As I said, the bulk of patients travel to Adelaide.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.2

Dr BURNS: What is the average cost of an interstate PATS trip? The answer I have been supplied with is \$1456. As you said that is the administrative cost which would include the accommodation, the air fare, the patient assisted travel. It does not include the cost of treatment and cross-border costs.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.3

Dr BURNS: You asked, member for Greatorex, question No 5.3, what is the average cost per patient intra-Territory and once again in the same criteria, the average PATS cost per patient intra-Territory is \$351.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.4

Dr BURNS: Your question on notice No 5.4, member for Greatorex, was how many oncology patients travel from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to Adelaide. The answer I have been supplied with is in 2006-07 approximately 101 patients from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek travelled to Adelaide to receive oncology treatment, which was about the same as I estimated.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.5

Dr BURNS: Question on notice No 5.5, what were the costs for advertising on television, radio and in print. The answer I have been supplied, to date in 2007-08, the following amounts have been spent by the department on advertising: print advertising, \$260 778.44; television advertising, \$55 353.71; radio advertising, \$14 432.54; and other, which includes banners, etcetera, \$25 134; making a total of \$355 698. I table these answers for the committee.

That is it so far I am advised.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: There was one more about the assets being written off. That is No 5.6.

Dr BURNS: When that comes to hand, member for Greatorex, I will certainly try to supply that to you.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister.

Dr BURNS: Sorry for that interruption, but it was for the information of the committee.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HEALTH AND WELL BEING SERVICES
Output 3.1 – Community Health Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0, Health and Wellbeing Services, Output 3.1, Community Health Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, can you let the committee know about visiting services for nursing mothers? What are they and how many are there?

Dr BURNS: You mean community services?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, under Community Health Services, visiting services to nursing mothers?

Dr BURNS: Dr Ashbridge has a response.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Can you restate the question, please?

Mr CONLAN: Visiting services to nursing mothers - what are they and how many are there?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: So, visiting services to nursing mothers, okay. This is a public sector response because clearly the private sector does that, so the quantum of our response is limited to the departmental service. We do not know what the private sector engagement is there.

Ms CLEARY: Jenny Cleary, Assistant Secretary Health Services. In terms of quantities, I will have to take that on notice and provide you with that information shortly. From both our urban Community Care Centres and our remote Community Health Centres, we have nursing and, in remote areas, Aboriginal Health Worker support for women after they have been discharged from hospital and they have returned to their communities or returned to their homes. Those services operate out of Casuarina, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Flynn Drive, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek, as well as from the 52 health centres that we operate across remote areas. In terms of FTEs of nurses involved in that role, I would need to take that on notice.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, if you would not mind. I will rephrase that question just how it was.

Question on Notice No 5.7

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purpose of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question?

Mr CONLAN: What are the visiting services and how many are there for nursing mothers?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate the question No 5.7.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, can you tell the committee how many new mothers leave hospital within 24 hours of giving birth?

Dr BURNS: I am advised that is probably a question for the Acute Services output but, in the interests of trying to supply information to the member for Greatorex, we will endeavour to try to find the answer to that question. We are calling Mr Campos forward and possibly if we just give him a little time to have the question repeated, he may be able to assist the member for Greatorex.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Repeat that question, please.

Mr CONLAN: Madam Deputy Chair, how many new mothers leave hospital within 24 hours of giving birth?

Mr CAMPOS: I am sorry, I do not have the actual number but we can try to get it for you. The normal length of stay for deliveries is three days. That time is coming down progressively. There are some women who do leave within four hours where there is support provided at home by visiting midwives. So, there is a variability of that. If it is okay we can take that information and try to get you the numbers.

Question on Notice No 5.8

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex, for the purpose of *Hansard*, would you please restate the question?

Mr CONLAN: How many new mothers leave hospital within 24 hours of giving birth?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am, Madam Deputy Chair.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you for that, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.8.

Mr CONLAN: Could I just have a follow-up question in the same area.

Dr BURNS: All right.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you for the indulgence. How many of them come back to hospital with complications which may include postnatal depression?

Dr BURNS: Of that group which leaves in 24 hours?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr CAMPOS: All complications or, specifically, postnatal depression?

Mr CONLAN: No, including postnatal depression. So, all complications, yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will allocate that as a separate question ...

Dr BURNS: No, hold on. Dr Ashbridge wants to ...

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Could I just clarify? You are asking about the complications in readmission to hospital?

Mr CONLAN: Complications as a result of giving birth.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: But if someone goes to their general practitioner that is not something we would keep in our records system. The information which we would have would be within government ...

Mr CONLAN: The question is how many would come back to hospital. They have been to hospital, and they come back.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: So, readmission. Okay. Thank you.

Question on Notice No 5.9

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will get you to clarify that question again, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: How many of those mothers who have left hospital within 24 hours of giving birth, return to hospital with complications which include postnatal depression?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.9.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister. This one I am sure would be in this category, 3.1. Is there a distance limit a midwife or nurse can travel from the Royal Darwin Hospital to deliver postnatal services? If there is, what is that limit?

Dr BURNS: Mr Campos will take that question.

Mr CAMPOS: Thank you. The distance would be within the metropolitan area. It would, potentially, cover up to Palmerston, but it would not go any further than that.

Mr CONLAN: Can you tell the committee, minister, what the current status of the Territory's public dental surgery waiting list is? Could you break it down by region?

Dr BURNS: Your question is on the current status of waiting lists?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, public dental surgery waiting lists across the Territory.

Dr BURNS: I have specific information about Darwin and Alice Springs which I can relay to you. In the note I have been handed, currently, as of March 2008, there is a maximum waiting time for an initial assessment of 38.5 months. In Darwin and Alice Springs, it is 18.5 months.

I suppose, as way of background to those waiting times - and I acknowledge they are long - it is true to say there have been national difficulties in recruiting dentists. There have been a number of vacancies within the dental services both in Darwin and Palmerston and, to a lesser extent, in Alice Springs. It is probably an area where Alice Springs leads the way. Dental services, over a long period of time, have been outstanding in Alice Springs. We have had difficulties in recruiting. I understand some positions are now filled, and we will be looking to reduce those waiting times. However, it is a national issue. There is a shortage of dentists both within the public and the private sectors. I am not sure whether the CEO wants to talk further on this issue.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: Thank you, minister. I want to make an opening comment: people who have an acute problem who present to the public dental service do not have to wait more than a couple of days - they are seen and assessed rapidly. I want to put on the record that urgent treatment, initial treatment, is something which is met expediently.

In some of the regional centres, I should point out the waiting lists in Gove and Katherine are, in fact, minimal and, in Tennant Creek, their next visit is in July 2008, and they do not have a very long wait. The waiting times are for what would be considered definitive or elective dental work, and they are in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Dr BURNS: There has been some extra investment of \$900 000 for specialist dental chairs at Royal Darwin Hospital. This was an announcement made as part of this budget. These are chairs for people who have special needs, who need to be worked up under a general anaesthetic and have their dental work done there. That could include those going for heart surgery who need dental work in preparation for their heart surgery, those who might be having renal transplantation and, of course, those who may be disabled in other ways who need a general anaesthetic to have their dental work done. We are investing in dental services. I acknowledge the times in Darwin have increased with time, but there have been challenges in

terms of recruitment. I am not sure whether Ms Cleary wants to talk about the recruitments that are being made to Darwin and Palmerston in terms of dentists.

Ms CLEARY: We have had a couple of vacancies in Darwin on and off for this year, and a couple of vacancies in Alice Springs over several months of the year which are currently filled. At this point in time, our vacancies are two out of the establishment of the Darwin Dental Clinic.

Dr BURNS: We will continue to try to recruit. We have tried to recruit within Australia and overseas. I believe we are offering competitive remuneration, but the fact is that there is a national shortage of dentists and it is a major workforce issue.

Mr CONLAN: Does this include dental screening of indigenous children?

Dr BURNS: As part of the intervention and the health checks, the children were, have been, and are being screened for caries. That was part of the support Tony Abbott gave, in terms of the checks and the dental work to support it. There is funding, as I understand it, within the intervention for follow-up dental work in those children who are identified with caries. I suspect there is a considerable number of them, but possibly Jenny Cleary might elaborate further for you.

Ms CLEARY: Just to let you know that our usual dental services, prior to the Australian government intervention, prioritise children and remote areas. The children's dental service is a very accessible service to children across the Territory. It is free, it is for all children; there are no eligibility criteria other than age. On top of that service, we have had an increase in activity in Central Australia at this stage and in a couple of areas in the Top End that is related to the Australian government intervention phase 2, which is the immediate follow-up treatment phase. Through that process, we have managed to see an additional 393 children who have had oral assessments as of the end of May. Then into June we have had something - I am sorry, I do not have the numbers for the Top End at my fingertips.

Mr CONLAN: Is that from January to May this year?

Ms CLEARY: It is over just a couple of months, April and May.

Mr CONLAN: So, prior to the intervention, what did the NT government have in place for dental health checks in remote communities?

Dr BURNS: Ms Cleary, if you can respond, please?

Ms CLEARY: In each of the centres from where we run oral health services, we have a children's dental service. We also have outreach services, either through dental therapists in the Top End, or through dentists in Central Australia to remote communities. Even in times of dentist shortages, we prioritise remote area visits. A key element of the remote area visit is working on children. It is a usual service.

Mr CONLAN: And it is currently side by side with the intervention at this stage?

Dr BURNS: It would be. An issue that has been raised with me by health professionals is that, in its initial stages, there was a fair bit of duplication by the intervention. Now there is a lot more focus on better integration, particularly in the coming phases of the intervention. That will not only save money but it will be a more efficient way to deal with this issue. I hope that answers your question.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister. No further questions, in the interests of time, Madam Deputy Chair.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just very briefly. Breast screening in Alice Springs, minister.

Dr BURNS: I have that brief open, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am interested in your department's policy as regards breast screening for people outside of Darwin. The service in Alice Springs seems to have diminished over last few years. Is the mobile unit still mobile and how are you catering for the number of people from out of town?

Dr BURNS: I just need to clarify something there, member for Braitling. My advice is that there has been an increase number of women who have been breast screened in Central Australia. The brief I have been given, and I specifically asked for it because I knew you and others, the member for Araluen, are very interested in this issue and this is a very important issue; the advice is over the past five years, close to

1000 women in Alice Springs have been breast screened. Five hundred more women were screened in 2007 than in 2006, the highest number in the past five years. Increases are most evident in the target group; that is women in the 50- to 69-year-old age groups. I am also advised that participation from indigenous women in the Northern Territory is 24.9%, an increase from 18.9% the previous year compared with the Australian average of 38%. An active strategy to engage indigenous women in the screening pathway is utilised; that comes from the report on government services which is a federal government publication. The advice I have is that there are more women being screened in Central Australia. There has been an increase in the number of indigenous women who have been screened. It is still well below the Australian average and we acknowledge there is a lot more work to do.

I ask Ms Cleary to further elaborate on the way the service operates in Central Australia. There have been changes. I acknowledge that, but the department is trying to get some flexibility in the utilisation of particularly very skilled professionals, like radiographers etcetera. The figures presented to me illustrate that it is bearing some fruit.

Ms CLEARY: The amount of screening offered in Alice Springs is calculated carefully around the target population. One thousand appointments are able to be provided within a 10-week period. That is provided in three blocks: one of three weeks, another of three weeks and one of four weeks. Regarding access for indigenous women, we specifically set aside appointments for indigenous women, especially from remote parts of Central Australia. We have arrangements in place with their usual primary health care - nurses and health workers, doctors, and the outreach midwives and women health educators - to group women from remote communities and bring them in for the service. Women do have much better access than some time back. We provide that service using the fixed X-ray facilities in Alice Springs but we use the mobile facility that you mentioned for Katherine, Gove and Tennant Creek. We are seeing improvement year by year in the number of women in the target group who actually get screened in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: The staff doing these screenings, minister, I believe you are contracting to Queensland. Is that so?

Dr BURNS: The answer to that is yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is there any particular reason?

Dr BURNS: Ms Cleary, can you respond to that?

Ms CLEARY: There is a national shortage of the professionals required to undertake breast screening and, in particular, radiographers. We get our staff where we can and the Queensland staff are very highly trained, and their service is of a very high standard. They provide us with an excellent level of service.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, a breast screen nurse and the counsellors work out of the Cancer Council. Could you give me some indication of how much funding the Cancer Council gets from the Northern Territory government?

Dr BURNS: I am not sure whether I have that figure at my fingertips, member for Braitling. The CEO is probably going to look at the grants that are given to various organisations. He has a big list of them here. Hopefully, if we are patient, he will be able to give you an amount.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, that is fine.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.6

Dr BURNS: While the CEO is looking at that, if I could just intercede here and say a question on notice No 5.6: has any equipment from department offices been written-off as a result of criminal activity or break ins. Member for Grottores, my advice is nil. That is what I have been advised. I table the answer to question on notice No 5.6.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you.

Dr BURNS: Back to the question from the member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am interested to know how much money the Cancer Council gets, as well as the break-up for any additional services such as the Breast Care nurse counsellor.

Dr BURNS: Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I suspect that this is not detailed enough, but I will give you the information that I have. The total grant to the Cancer Council of the Northern Territory in 2007-08 was \$225 615. I do not have with me the breakdown of the allocations within that as to how that is used.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, can you advise me how much the federal government gives to the Cancer Council, or is that something you would not know?

Dr BURNS: I am not aware of that information. Dr Ashbridge.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I am also unaware of that information. I just need to give you some additional information. There is \$225 615 as I said from the Community Health Program. In addition to that there is \$81 198 going to the Cancer Council from the Acute Care sector. In total, approximately \$305 000.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, minister. That is all, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Breast screening: you said in December last year after I raised the matter publicly, sometime after the department sent around its dates for the 10 week blocks which happen on three separate occasions this year, that the numbers of weeks the Breast Screen service operated had remained pretty much unchanged for the last few years. I have a copy of that article. Perhaps for the sake of completeness I should copy it. According to the article, dated 28 December 2007, you said: 'The clinics do operate three times a year but this is the level the service has operated at for the past three years. Before that the services was only offered twice a year.' Was that accurate, minister?

Dr BURNS: I would not have said 'was', but ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, apart from the grammar, but was that accurate?

Dr BURNS: That is what I was advised, member for Araluen. I will ask Ms Cleary to further elaborate.

Ms CLEARY: It is true that we provide services in the three blocks as previously described. Several years back we provided the equivalent of nine weeks' screening, so it is roughly similar; just a small increase.

Ms CARNEY: When you say a few years back, how many years are you talking about?

Dr BURNS: 2002 is the advice I have.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. My concern is - and I have an article from the *Centralian Advocate* in 1997. In this article it said six screening rounds are held in Alice Springs a year and run for four or five weeks. It went on to say the part-time Alice Springs breast screening unit operates 26 weeks each year. On the bottom of this page, it lists the blocks of screening. There are about 24 or something like that. It used to be the case that the breast screen service in Alice Springs operated more than it does now. Why is it not operating more often than it did 10 years ago? Why is it operating less?

Dr BURNS: There are operational reasons why the service was changed, around flexibility, as I said previously, of particularly the technical staff, the radiographers, to give them more flexibility in outreach in other regions within Central Australia. That is my advice, member for Araluen. Dr Ashbridge would like to comment further.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: You can judge access or sustainability of service by how many weeks are open. You can also judge it by how many services are being provided. In the last year, there have never been as many services provided as ever before, under any previous arrangement.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, can you explain that? What do you mean by services when you have 10 weeks operating in 2008 and 26 weeks operating in 1997?

Dr BURNS: I believe what the CEO is saying is occasions of service; the number of women who actually have breast screening during that time. We are talking about efficiency and efficient use of technicians and technical equipment and, also, providing the service which is a breast screen to eligible women. On both counts, as the CEO said, there has been an increase with this regime in the number of women who have been screened. Certainly, in the target age group, the participation rates are very high. I believe that is what is being said, member for Araluen. The CEO wishes to further elaborate.

Dr ASHBRIDGE: There are two points of information. One of them is the 1000 occasions to service, as I have said, under the current arrangement is more than has ever been done before. It is my understanding that, when the 26-week service was being identified by the member, I should advise out of that 26 weeks there was only nine weeks of screening.

Ms CARNEY: Nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21. I take it that you are not suggesting that BreastScreen NT put in an advertisement on 15 April 1997 misleading women in Central Australia as to when they could go and get their breasts checked?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I am making the point there is a difference between doors opened for services and screening. I made a point that there was nine weeks of screening. The doors may have been opened for the number of weeks you described, but the number of weeks of screening, I am advised, was nine.

Ms CARNEY: I am telling you that, on the basis of this information, particularly as it says the word 'screen' in weeks and other blocks occurred significantly – significantly – more frequently than it does now.

Dr BURNS: All I can say is that this probably would have been a good question for the Labor opposition to ask the then Health Minister and then CEO of Territory Health in 1997.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks for that dismissive answer, but it is very serious. I do not know whether you would know, minister, but when BreastScreen NT opened, it was part of a well women service. It was meant to be open regularly so that women would walk past and say, must get that job done. The doors are closed more often than not. Noting the description of this area, page 149, Budget Paper No 3: 'maintains and enhances the health and wellbeing of Territorians through a range of preventative, health-promoting, early intervention treatment and support services'. It is very difficult, with great respect, to see how you are meeting that objective, and it is a great objective, but how can you meet that objective when the doors of the breast screening service in Alice Springs are closed more often than not?

Dr BURNS: I can only repeat what I have said previously, and as the CEO has said, is that there are more women being screened, and the number of women who are participating in the target group of women is very pleasing, and also, there has been an increase in screening of Aboriginal women. I cannot speak about what happened in 1997. I am going on the advice that I have been given by my CEO and Ms Cleary. I cannot add any more to what you are saying.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Just a couple more quick questions on this one. The reference to 'more women are being screened than ever before' – when were the last figures? When do you go back to? Do you go back to, in making that assertion, 1997? Do you go back to 1973? Do you go back to 2002? What is the starting point?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I have been advised that we can provide that information right back from when the service started. I can also advise that 2007-08 was the highest number ever.

Ms CARNEY: Just so that I am clear, are you saying that it was the highest number ever since the service commenced?

Dr BURNS: That is what the CEO is saying, member for Araluen, and I am taking advice from the CEO. You have raised a very important issue. You have some evidence there and a newspaper advertisement from 1997, so it is an important issue. I am more than happy to take that question on notice. In the interests of transparency and the important question that you have asked, I will take that on notice and I am more than happy to table that information to this committee.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you. It seemed, as you were speaking you may not have seen it, but I think Dr Ashbridge might have been saying yes. Did I read that correctly?

Dr ASHBRIDGE: I did not say anything.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, can we do that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.10

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purpose of *Hansard*, could you please restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: When Dr Ashbridge said that 1000 women were screened for the year at the Alice Springs NT ...

Dr BURNS: A point of order, Madam Deputy Chair. I am prepared to take the question. Let us not get Dr Ashbridge as part of the question. On advice, the minister has informed the committee, and this is a question on notice to bring all those figures before the committee year by year so that ...

Ms CARNEY: Okay. How about we do it like this? Will the minister provide details of the number of screenings at BreastScreen NT Alice Springs from the date it opened? Fair enough?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: Yes, I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.10.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, your officer there, whose name I forget ...

Dr BURNS: Jenny Cleary.

Ms CARNEY: Jenny Cleary, sorry, Ms Cleary. You referred to outreach services and you said that indigenous women were brought in from bush areas, which is terrific. How different is BreastScreen NT these days from how it used to be? There were, in fact, outreach services, education services or campaigns run in the bush. I accept that things have changed. Which ones are better?

Ms CLEARY: To the best of my knowledge we have not provided breast screening services outside of the centres we currently provide them from before. It is about bringing women to access the service from remote areas rather than having changed the model. We have now in place a network of women's health educators around our remote areas. They operate out of each of the main towns. Their job is specifically to take care of remote women's health. They are great advocates for the breast screening service. There is a lot of work to mobilise access for the women they look after. Part of their work, for example, is to educate our remote health staff about women's cancer prevention services, and they also do some of the PAP smears in remote areas. That is the kind of role they have. It is really those staff who are performing a lot of the promotion of breast screening for remote area women. That service improves from year to year.

Ms CARNEY: In a sense a sort of a modern day variation of what BreastScreen NT used to do in terms of travelling out bush. It is done in a different way these days and it is working reasonably effectively, yes?

Ms CLEARY: The breast screening function, the actual X-ray function, does not travel ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I meant in terms of education.

Ms CLEARY: I understand the question now. I believe it is a better system to have the nurses and health workers who provide the usual women's health care for those remote area women providing the promotion of breast screening.

Ms CARNEY: A final question. Minister, are you aware of an article that Dr John Boffa wrote in relation to breast screening recently. I forget the name of the medical journal in which it was published but it received some publicity. It has become public, I gather, in the last six weeks or so. Dr Boffa, a man whom you quote not infrequently, from Alice Springs was pretty scathing about the lack of breast screening

services for indigenous women. I recall the figure was 24% of indigenous women are screened. Can we do better?

Dr BURNS: I acknowledged when I talked about the breast screening amongst indigenous women that it is nearly 25% now. This has increased from approximately 19% in the previous year compared with the Australian average of 38%. I acknowledged right up-front there that whilst there has been an improvement and a significant improvement, we are still way behind the Australian average. We need to do a lot more and work harder. In terms of the assertions made by Dr Boffa, it is a hard for me as I do not have the article in front of me here. I will endeavour to get it. Possibly Ms Cleary could elaborate further. The answer to your question: yes, we can do better, we have to do better.

Ms CLEARY: I think Dr John Boffa, who is a highly valued colleague, was drawing our attention to the increase in notifications of breast cancer. In fact, what that represents is improved detection of breast cancer. We do have a lot of data, especially published through our cancer incidence in the Northern Territory, reporting that breast cancer is better detected in Aboriginal women than it used to be and, therefore, their survival rate, post diagnosis is much better than it used to be. This is actually a good news story. It is a story about detection. Dr Boffa was calling for more access to breast screening. We have sufficient appointments available to the women of Central Australia to cover the entire target population. Any additional promotion of breast screening in Central Australia will be adding to our service, improving our service. We would be very happy about it.

In terms of women's health, cancer outcomes, we have had recent compilation of data up to 2005 which shows that from 1991 to 2005 we have seen a 92% reduction in the incidence of cancer of the cervix in Aboriginal women across the Northern Territory. Again, it is testament to the level of screening that is going on in remote and urban areas with indigenous women. Their cervical abnormalities are becoming corrected prior to cancer actually taking hold.

Dr BURNS: I commend the department and also the federal government for the distribution of the HPV vaccine which is being rolled out across the Territory to young women of an eligible age. I believe that will have very positive effects in this particular area.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Ms Cleary. I read Dr Boffa's article and he, in addition to making the points you have said, did make the point vigorously at the end that there needs to be better screening. So, a matter for you, minister. Perhaps next time you are talking to Dr Boffa about things that you would talk about in another portfolio, you might like to talk with him about this issue. Thank you, I will leave it at that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 3.1. I am mindful that we have been going now for just under three hours. Would we like to take a break?

Dr BURNS: I want to press on. I really look forward to estimates.

Ms CARNEY: You are the only minister who gets here 10 minutes early!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The remainder of the Output Group, Outputs 3.2 to 3.4, was addressed by minister Scrymgour this morning.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Output 4.1 - Environmental Health Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Public Health Services; Output 4.1, Environmental Health Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: No, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No questions. That concludes consideration of 4.1.

Output 4.2 - Disease Control Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.2, Disease Control Services. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: No, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: No questions. That concludes consideration of Output 4.2. Questions on Output 4.3 were also addressed by minister Scrymgour this morning.

Output 4.4 - Health Research

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.4, Health Research. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I am wondering what research you had, or if indeed you do have any research, that points to the fact that there are no smoke-related diseases or illnesses in the Northern Territory in pubs and clubs, seeing that it is a policy of the Northern Territory government not to ban smoking in pubs and clubs, or to embark on a policy to ban smoking in pubs and clubs.

Dr BURNS: I am having difficulty following the question.

Mr CONLAN: I will put it this way: why will you not ban smoking in pub and clubs throughout the Northern Territory?

Dr BURNS: Currently, minister Scrymgour has responsibility for that portfolio area, but I will say this, and I have said it on the public record, that as a government we are prepared to take the next steps in relation to the very issue you raise. That is the undertaking I have given publicly. I have also said the measures will be appropriate and done in consultation with the public and the industry. Everyone realises it is time to take the next steps. Government is acknowledging that. Minister Scrymgour has been developing some proposals in relation to this and, when I take over the portfolio as of 1 July, I will be progressing those proposals developed by minister Scrymgour.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Greatorex we are actually on 4.4, which is Health Research.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, that is right. My question was what research the minister might have to point to smoke-related illnesses throughout the Northern Territory.

Dr BURNS: I hope I have answered your question.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? There being no further questions, that now concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0 and all output groups.

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, could I just say before the Health people leave, I thank them - and I am sure all members join me in thanking them - for all their hard work in compiling these estimates papers. There is a lot of detail. It is helpful, not only for me as minister to get across the length and breadth and detail here, but I believe and I hope it has been very informative for other members. I am sure they join with me in thanking the public servants who have come along here today for all their hard work.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I also thank the officers for providing advice to the minister today.

Mr CONLAN: Can I just ask the minister one more question? Because you have been so indulgent today about areas that are non-specific to certain outputs, minister, I was wondering whether I might be able to ask you about the Barton/Frommer report which we did not get to throughout the course of the last three hours. Would you be prepared to let us know what happened between ...

Dr BURNS: Let me say, member for Greatorex, if we go the Barton/Frommer report, I might also go to my adjournment debate where I highlighted the fact that I thought that you and the member for Araluen - I forget the exact word I used, it might have been 'misrepresented'. I just do not think you were very clear or represented well exactly what the recommendations of the Barton/Frommer report were. We could talk about it, but we are likely to have a bit of a blue.

Mr CONLAN: No, I would just like to know what the difference is between - and in that adjournment debate, perhaps you were being a little misleading because Recommendation 6 says exactly what I said in my adjournment debate or my response. But, nevertheless ...

Dr BURNS: I was referring to the final. You might try to justify what has happened, member for Greatorex. I suggest you come back with an adjournment debate and ...

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask you then, minister, what is the difference between this report, July 2004, and August 2004?

Dr BURNS: The report I quoted in parliament was the published final report of the Barton/Frommer report. We all know in government there are various iterations of reports. What I was doing was quoting from the final report which you should have been doing also.

Mr CONLAN: Can I suggest then that, perhaps next time you put out a report, you put 'draft' on it. Nowhere on this report here does it say that it is a draft, and there is nowhere on this that it says 'final draft'.

Dr BURNS: Obviously, you are a bit embarrassed by what I said in adjournment, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: No, not at all, minister, because I was purely quoting what it said here in clause 6.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That output is now finished. We will have a five minute recess in between change of portfolios.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I again welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Justice.

Dr BURNS: It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon for the budget estimates on the Department of Justice which includes Corrections etcetera. I have with me from the Department of Justice, the CEO, Mr Greg Shanahan; the Deputy CEO Policy Coordination, Ms Elizabeth Morris; and the Deputy CEO Business Strategy and Performance, Dr Terry Dreier. Other relevant Justice staff are present here today and will be called on as needed.

At the outset, I would like to make a couple of points which I believe the committee will find helpful. The 2008-09 Budget Papers provide a significant level of detail relevant to the 2008-09 Budget, with particular output budget data provided in Budget Paper No 3, otherwise known as BP3. BP3 provides information on the budget of my department detailed down to output level. The committee should be aware, and this is important, that the performance information contained in BP3 under the title 2007-08 Estimate comprises actual data recorded up to and including the third quarter 2007-08 and extrapolated for the full year. The financial information provided is based on actual data from the Government Accounting System and, in most cases, it is current as at 30 April 2008.

Last year's BP3 reported an output cost budget of \$157m for the Department of Justice for 2007-08. In this year's Budget Paper No 3, the output cost estimate for 2007-08 is reported at \$170.8m, the difference being \$13.8m. This figure is the difference between the budget amount provided for at the commencement of 2007-08 and the budget position recorded at the budget preparation time in 2008. In other words, the figure of \$170.8m is Treasury's statement of the Department of Justice's 2007-08 budgetary position at the time of preparation of the 2008-09 Budget. The major variations which make up the \$13.8m are: \$3.3m under *Closing the Gap*; \$2.2m movement in federally-funded programs; \$800 000 movement in judicial funding; \$1.4m in funding for antisocial behaviour initiatives; \$1.4m carried forward from the previous year; \$1.4m for agency-based lawyers; and \$3.3m in other sundry movements.

Before I highlight some of the main components of the budget for 2008-09, I would like to outline a few of the portfolio's key achievements in 2007-08. We are fast-tracking alcohol abuse reduction initiatives across the Territory, led by a continuing roll-out of local alcohol management plans. These plans are supported by dry town declarations, ID and permit systems, and the alcohol court. These are leading to big drops in alcohol quantities sold in these areas, and we are starting to see a corresponding reduction in violent crime.

We have developed and introduced a comprehensive youth justice strategy to get the relatively small minority of youth causing problems in the community back on track. This strategy includes a family responsibility system, commencement of youth camps in the Top End and Central Australia, and limitations on juvenile diversion.

The Department of Justice has also provided the substantial contribution to important whole-of-government antisocial behaviour initiatives, including managing Return to Country programs and the Darwin area Night Patrol. Significant budget adjustments have been provided in for 2008-09 in relation to the following items: an increase of \$6.9m has been provided to Corrections to accommodate increasing numbers of prisoners in Territory facilities; an additional \$1m to Corrections under *Closing the Gap* to enhance its probation and parole service in remote NT, expand the sex offender treatment program, expand the indigenous family violence program, and expand the elders visiting program; \$400 000 to boost the services to victims of crime through improved management of higher case loads; an initial \$400 000 to provide resources for the DPP to more effectively pursue child sex prosecutions; \$500 000 is being provided for additional educational programs for people in gaol; an initial \$130 000 to meet the increase in Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission costs; an extra \$1.3m to fund antisocial behaviour initiatives including \$200 000 from *Closing the Gap*; and an additional \$700 000 under *Closing the Gap* to develop and maintain the alcohol management ID system, and provide additional licensing inspectors.

Finally, the CEO completed the restructure of the department, effective 1 July 2007. This has had an impact on the output structure and resulted in budget rearrangements. For the benefit of the committee, the department has reconstructed the published Budget for 2007-08 as if the new structure was in place at the time of preparing the 2007-08 Budget. This document evidences budgetary movements across affected outputs. I am tabling this document. Note that it is the new structure as in effect in the 2007-08 Budget and ongoing.

In essence, the total budget published in 2007-08 in Budget Paper No 3 was \$157.731m. With the new budget structure, you can see, with the changes in the matrix here, it is exactly the same figure. In essence, what is being said here is that, although there has been a restructure, transparency in the process, there has been no money taken away from the department or the programs *in toto*. So both columns add up to the same.

I am more than happy to take questions. The member for Araluen has signalled that she would like to ask questions in the non-output specific briefs; that is, the corporate area and other areas that are not specifically covered by an output area.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any questions relating to the opening statement?

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. First, welcome again. We are going to run out of time, and Mr Mills would like to get to licensing and regulation. I know Mr Wood wants to get to Correctional Services. All of us will be culling our questions. Please do not interpret that to mean that we (a) did not prepare them, and (b) are not interested, because both would not be true.

So, generic questions. Minister, how many executives work for the department, both executive contract and non-contract? How many of those executives have personal assistants, executive assistants, executive information coordinators or administrative assistants? Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles? If you have the information in a table, can you please table it?

Dr BURNS: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition, for your question ...

Ms CARNEY: Oh, you have done what Hendo was doing all last night.

Dr BURNS: What was that?

Ms CARNEY: Millsy is the Leader of the Opposition.

Dr BURNS: Oh, I am sorry. It was inadvertent.

Ms CARNEY: I am touched!

Dr BURNS: Member for Araluen, I have done all right, so far today. Thanks for bringing that to my attention.

I will let the CEO speak to this, but I preface his remarks by saying, particularly in the last year, there has been a lot of policy work done around the intervention and issues arising out of the intervention. There is also policy work to be done around government initiatives around the Youth Justice strategy, *Closing the Gap*, etcetera. I will let the CEO and Dr Dreier address specifically your question.

Mr SHANAHAN: Greg Shanahan, Chief Executive Officer. What we have here is a table which has a comparison of the last three years of all our staffing numbers by designation. We also have an index to what the abbreviations are.

Ms CARNEY: Through you, minister, in the interests of time, if the information is there ...

Dr BURNS: We are quite prepared to table it, member for Araluen

Ms CARNEY: Thank you

Mr SHANAHAN: In terms of the executive officers having assistants, apart from the judges who have an entitlement to a personal secretary via their determination, all of the other executive assistants and the like are all shared resources. There is actually no one who is dedicated to a particular executive officer.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many traffic incidents, including crashes, were departmental vehicles involved in, in 2007-08? Was alcohol or non-wearing of seat belts a factor in any of them and, if so, how many?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO or Dr Dreier on this issue.

Dr DREIER: Dr Terry Dreier, Deputy CEO, Business Strategy and Performance. In the number of fines, we are advised there were none. In accidents, it is in here somewhere. If you can give me a few moments, I will dig it up. Perhaps I can come back to that.

Ms CARNEY: Sure.

Dr BURNS: Do you want to put that on notice?

Ms CARNEY: Can we let it dangle?

Dr BURNS: Yes, okay.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many speeding infringements, as in speed camera fines, if any, were issued to departmental staff?

Dr BURNS: Specifically, speed camera fines?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, while driving departmental vehicles, obviously.

Dr DREIER: To the best of our knowledge, none.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Can you provide a list of any consultancies that were engaged during the course of the year? How many ended up more expensive than the initial costing due to variations, and who approved the variations? If you can table a document that would be preferable.

Dr BURNS: As has been answered in previous sessions, there are various categories. I have a list here and I am more than happy to table that. In terms of whether any consultancies cost more than had originally been allocated, I will leave that to the CEO.

Mr SHANAHAN: My understanding is that there have been no consultancies whereby we have exceeded the agreed tender price.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Dr BURNS: I will table that here.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, how many square metres of property, as in office space, does the department have per employee, and how does it compare to the government standard if there is one?

Dr BURNS: I will start answering that question. As a former minister for government accommodation, I can tell, without taking away from the minister for DCIS, that government has a committee that assesses office space needs and the class of accommodation. There are rules around that. For the specific information about the number of square metres per employee, I will defer to Dr Dreier.

Dr DREIER: That sort of information is held by Northern Territory Property Management.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, we will ask them, thank you. Next question: what is the cost of artwork for campaigns in your department? By campaigns they are, obviously, promotional campaigns and other activities.

Dr BURNS: That is a good question. The member for Araluen is specifically asking about artwork in campaigns. We do have some figures and some amounts around our campaigns. I am not sure whether we have about the artwork specifically.

Ms CARNEY: I am assuming that, as in previous years, you have, perhaps, a table with all costs of producing, from start to finish, promotional campaigns. If so, is it easier for you to table that document?

Dr BURNS: I have some global figures here. Under Major Marketing Campaigns, a total of \$345 000 has been committed until 30 June 2008 for the following campaigns: Alice dry town liquor supply, \$34 000; Katherine and Mataranka dry town liquor supply, \$52 000; Darwin dry areas, \$39 000; photo ID system, Alice Springs and Katherine, \$50 000; East Arnhem permit and restricted areas, \$17 000; parental family responsibility, \$75 000; pornography classification, \$28 000; and misuse of drugs, \$50 000. Underneath that, I do not have any specific information about artwork. Dr Dreier wants to respond.

Dr DREIER: We would be happy to table that report, and we also have a further document which itemises the costs in each of those major categories. It also totals up the total of the advertising, marketing and promotion budget for the year. It also lists the staff in the communications area, which I presume you are probably going to ask.

Dr BURNS: Shall we table that?

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, yes. This is slightly different. What is the cost to departments in respect of staff involved in media and marketing management?

Dr BURNS: Dr Dreier has tabled the FTEs in there. Do you want to respond further, Dr Dreier? Do you have an indicative cost of how much the budget is for the communication section?

Dr DREIER: We have a brief on the corporate costs, which was the question that has been generally asked. It includes corporate coms, and we are happy to table that.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Next one: does your office contain a departmental liaison officer? If so, at what level is he, she or they employed, and what are their functions?

Dr BURNS: In answer to the member for Araluen's question, currently, there is no department liaison officer from DOJ in my office, but I would like one.

Ms CARNEY: How many reviews or audits were put in place as a result of breaches of discipline, for example, credit card abuse?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO and Dr Dreier for this one.

Dr DREIER: We have a report from the Internal Audit Committee, which shows all of the audits that are completed through the year. It also refers to a credit card investigation. We have a credit card policy document, which we are happy to table as well.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that would be useful, thank you.

Dr BURNS: Member for Araluen, I omitted to say that I do have a departmental liaison officer in my office who does the registry. That is an oversight on my part. I would not mind an extra DLO.

Ms CARNEY: Do I take it from your answer, Dr Dreier, through you, minister, that there has been one breach of discipline in relation to credit card misuse?

Dr DREIER: There was one investigation in relation to that. I am trying to dig up the report, but I do not think there were any foul findings in that. If you give me a moment.

Dr BURNS: So, are you looking up your briefs, Dr Dreier?

Dr DREIER: I am.

Ms CARNEY: I would have expressed that differently, minister, but that is just me.

Dr DREIER: We have the Internal Audit Committee's report for the year. We have the Internal Audit Committee Charter, which was a question asked at some other time. We have our current Corporate Credit Card Policy, which we have tabled. We have our current IT Policy document, which we tabled. I am assuming that the question is going to come shortly on procurement, so we have a document on procurement we can table.

Ms CARNEY: Let us anticipate it. You are well served, minister, by your departmental officers.

Dr BURNS: They do a fantastic job and there has been a lot of work in here, and I commend them. We want to expedite this process, as you said, and I want to make it as transparent as possible.

Ms CARNEY: We do, thank you. Through you, minister, Dr Dreier, do I assume that in the bundle of documents you have very kindly tabled that it includes any references to investigations undertaken in relation to IT misuse. If so, how many instances were there of misuse in 2007-08?

Dr DREIER: There was an audit in relation to some misuse of Lotus Notes. The finding of that was that there was no misuse of the Lotus Notes. I think that was the one I referred to as the one IT review that was done.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. We have done the generic questions, thank you, everybody.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I think these two questions are generic; they are short and sweet. Minister, what happened to the law of property bill and does the government intend to introduce it eventually into parliament?

Dr BURNS: I am advised it is currently being revised and going out to targeted consultation. Member for Nelson, there is a large list of legislation; there is a lot going on. Although we are keen to bring new legislation into parliament, we need to prioritise them. That is the advice I have been given.

Mr WOOD: You would understand this started four or five years ago. After three attempts, the government said it would bring its own and, then, around Christmas last year, they were going to introduce it. The penny dropped for some people in the Real Estate Industry and it was withdrawn, I gather.

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, I know the previous Attorney-General gave you and the parliament an undertaking that it would be introduced, pending consultation and the like. As everyone is aware, with vendor disclosure, basically, it is about giving a prospective buyer information about the property that they are about to purchase. You, as I recall, brought in legislation as a private member on a GBD ...

Mr WOOD: Three times.

Dr BURNS: ... that had a wide spectrum of requirements, and far wider than government went out to the industry with. That caused some meltdown. You are always talking about the cost to the buyer, and this is something we need to be mindful of. It has been an interesting process with the industry. We are coming to agreement. There are many questions to answer, as you well know, such as should a current pest certificate be there. They only remain current for a fairly short specific period of time so, you could have been putting someone selling a property to repeated expense which, of course, they are going to add on to the value of the property.

What we are trying to do is find a balance and bring industry with us on this particular issue. You and I remember the issue of certificates of occupancy and what that did. I was able to work through that and, in the end, when everyone understood and agreed, there was consensus, and I do not think it is such a burning issue as it was. Whilst there have been some delays, what we have to do is consult with the industry. I have already said to you it is on the point of going out to targeted discussion. It is progressing. I know it has taken a long while but, if your bill had been passed, it would have caused meltdown mode in the industry. I am sure you have had representation from industry on this particular issue.

Government is trying to find a fair way that gives the prospective owner the information that is required but, at the same time, it is involving and getting agreement from industry and, at the same time, not adding inordinate amounts to the price of a house.

Mr WOOD: I did have a lot of consultation with both real estate and conveyancing people before I introduced it. It was changed according to their criticisms of my legislation.

Dr BURNS: But they are still not happy.

Mr WOOD: I sat down at the Real Estate Institute with my bill and they were, but my bill was not the same as your bill, and that may be why.

Dr BURNS: My advice when I came into this portfolio was that your bill had a wider set of requirements than what is being put forward.

Mr WOOD: They were not the requirements that the complaint was about. We will see what comes up.

Dr BURNS: Okay.

Mr WOOD: Minister, have you have started drafting a caravan parks bill? I say that in light of a recent problem in a caravan park in the Darwin region where people were paying around about \$175 a week for a

site, and received a letter saying it is now \$250 a week. Those who complained were threatened with, basically: 'Well, you will have it at \$290 a week'. A letter from the company, basically, said: 'We know you cannot do anything about it because you are not covered under the *Tenancies Act*'.

Dr BURNS: Good question, member for Nelson. I have actually signed off on a public consultation paper to go out - I think earlier this week - and that paper will be circulated very soon. It canvasses these issues that you have spoken about. In addition, there is an issue about people living in marinas - the member for Millner has raised this issue with me as well - even broadening the prospective scope of what these laws could apply to. It has gone out to consultation and I know that you will have some views on it. I look forward to that.

Mr WOOD: Will residents get a fair chance to get hold of that discussion paper? That was one of the harder things I found when doing my survey.

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO about the actual mechanism for the communications around this. Or the Deputy CEO, Elizabeth Morris.

Ms MORRIS: Elizabeth Morris, Deputy CEO, Policy Coordination. There will be broad-ranging public consultation opportunities to make sure that paper gets to residents so they can consider it.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. That is all my questions for the time.

Ms CARNEY: One more. What happened to the Office of Crime Prevention? It had a budget last year of about \$3.6m or something. There is a new unit called Research and Statistics, which has less than \$1m. When the next crime statistics come out, where are you going to find them?

Dr BURNS: This is part of the realignment and the changes that is being talked about. Many of those changes will also be taking place on 1 July. I will defer to the CEO on this.

Mr SHANAHAN: The functions that remain from that are pretty much absorbed by Community and Justice Policy, which is under Policy Coordination.

Ms CARNEY: I will leave it at that. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates for proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 as they relate to the Department of Justice. I will now call on questions for Output Group 1.0 ...

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, I was going to say we have an answer to that question. I am sorry to interrupt.

Ms CARNEY: The dangled one?

Mr DREIER: The question related to the number of accidents or the value of the accidents. Data provided by NT Fleet said that of the 26 vehicles that were returned to NT Fleet for the year, there were repair bills for some \$31 650. However, we have only received notification today that there has, unfortunately, been an accident involving one of our Corrections vehicles. The first indications are that it will be written off, but we have no other information on it as yet.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – SOLICITOR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY **Output 1.1 – Solicitor for the Northern Territory**

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Solicitor for the Northern Territory; Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, heaps of questions, but I will just do a couple if I can. Last year, minister, the committee was advised that there were people in place to administer the new Crimes Victims Assistance Scheme, and that there was a Crimes Victims Services Unit. We were advised that in Darwin, there would be 4.1 people employed, which dropped to 3.5. How many people are currently employed in the unit and, following from the question we asked last year, is a unit going to be opened in Alice Springs?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to the CEO on this question. The question is the number of FTEs working in this area of Crimes Victims Assistance.

Mr SHANAHAN: We are going to finding the information, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, we will let that dangle. What about the Alice Springs factor? Is an office going to open in Alice?

Mr SHANAHAN: The proposal in Alice Springs is something we have been working on; it is a work in progress. What we are planning to do is that we have recently been able to secure additional space in Belvedere House. We are actually planning to have a one-stop Justice services-type shop. That will be included as part of that. At the moment, I think it is serviced through the Court House. That is the only presence we have there for the CBD.

Ms CARNEY: And you have a person or several people employed there?

Mr SHANAHAN: Not on this particular thing, no. The inquiries are referred to Darwin, but that is ...

Ms CARNEY: In the interests of time, I will leave it at that, thank you. Except for the dangle. How are we going, Mr Dreier?

Dr BURNS: Dr Dreier.

Ms CARNEY: Dr Dreier, is it?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry.

Dr DREIER: There was an amalgam last year made of one funded position, and the Solicitor for the Northern Territory provided additional resources, which made it up to about five or six, varying throughout the year. Government has provided additional funding in 2008-09. I am advised that the number of FTEs will probably be about seven.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so seven in Darwin, zilch in Alice Springs?

Dr DREIER: That is seven in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: That is another way of looking at it. Thank you. I will leave it at that, thanks.

Mr WOOD: Minister, just a couple of questions, and I will try to keep it short. In the 2006-07 annual report it stated that there was a settlement concluded between the Northern Territory by G and C Milatos and Clayton Utz with respect to the development of Lake Bennett. Could you quickly say what that was in relation to, and what was the settlement?

Dr BURNS: What I can say in opening, member for Nelson, is that this is a very complex matter. Mr Milatos and his company took both the Northern Territory government and Clayton Utz to court and there was a settlement. I am not sure of the confidentiality aspects of that settlement. I will ask the CEO to respond further.

Mr SHANAHAN: Mr Wood, there was a settlement. The action against the Territory was withdrawn. The details of the settlement, however, are a confidential legal settlement so we cannot give you that information.

Mr WOOD: All right. The other issue is one that I think has been raised here before. It relates to the Newcastle Waters matter. It is called the Polygon claim. I might be wrong there. I just wanted to know where that test case is at present, or is it finished?

Dr BURNS: It has been going a long while. I had better take some advice on that. I will have to take that question on notice, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Question on Notice No 5.11

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you please supply information in relation to what is called the Newcastle Waters matter, which is a test case related to native title, and where that test case is at, at present?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take the question on notice?

Dr BURNS: Of course I am, Madam Deputy Chair. Let me tell the member for Nelson I have just about every other native title case here, but not that one.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.11.

Mr WOOD: I think it was Steve Dunham who raised it a long time ago.

Dr BURNS: Oh, I remember.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Agency Legal Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2, Agency Legal Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: I do, but time is against us, so I will forgo asking questions, thanks.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any questions?

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – COURT SUPPORT AND INDEPENDENT OFFICES
Output 2.1 – Higher Courts

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Court Support and Independent Offices, Output 2.1, Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. I am pretty sure this is the right area, minister. The matter a couple of months ago in Alice Springs referred to by Justice Eames about the difficulties at the Alice Springs Court House. You will remember it, I am sure, because Justice Eames described the technology at the court as hopeless, and said that a simple matter such as lighting and sound were completely inadequate and, according to an ABC online report it said, and I quote: 'The technology in Alice Springs is simply not up to scratch'. He went on, but that is an indication of how scathing he was. Can you tell us what you are doing to upgrade the technology? We will leave it at that. Then I am going to ask you, obviously, about the witness room, otherwise known as the vulnerable witness room.

Dr BURNS: It is an important question from the member for Araluen. I have asked the department to address this issue. The department has now received a report from an expert, recommending a number of changes to upgrade the systems at Alice Springs and make them easier to operate. The total estimated cost of works to be undertaken in the court room and the vulnerable witness room is approximately \$120 000. I am further advised that the required work will commence next week. In the interim, any pre-recording of evidence will be closely monitored to ensure that it is of suitable quality. Efforts are also being made to enhance the audio on the pre-recorded DVD to a quality suitable for use in a trial. It is an important issue; action is being taken. I am not sure whether the CEO has anything further to add.

Mr SHANAHAN: The only thing I would like to add is that we did, in fact, spend a good deal of money on this towards the end of last year. We spent \$20 000 or \$30 000 on the vulnerable witness room itself,

plus about \$110 000 on the court room. Telstra gave us the videoconferencing system in the vulnerable witness room. We had a different consultant give us the one in the main room but, unfortunately, they were not as well integrated as they should be. The latest proposals will bring that all together. It was not a matter of us ignoring it; we knew it was an issue. We tried to do it and, obviously, it did not turn out as well as it should have.

Ms CARNEY: Through you minister, it went completely pear shaped. The court, somewhat pretentiously referred to as Court 5, received an extraordinary amount of money, and the vulnerable witness room, which is incredibly small, materialised as a result of the disastrous one that was created upstairs. It has really been pretty badly managed for the last couple of years. In relation to what is going to happen now, can you tell me what works are going to occur in relation to the vulnerable witness room, because I would like to know whether, third time round, it is going to be fixed properly?

Dr BURNS: As I said before, it is an important question and I want this fixed, so I will ask Mr Shanahan to elaborate on the proposed works, as you have asked.

Mr SHANAHAN: All I can say is that we have engaged a person who is an expert in this area to bring the whole thing together. The proposal is to spend \$43 000 on the vulnerable witness room itself, in addition to improved lighting and other issues surrounding that. We will also be looking at, as I said before, integrating the system so that we get recordings of an acceptable standard.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, \$43 000 on the room. Are you going to be using the same room? The room is not going to be moved, it is the same room?

Dr BURNS: Member for Araluen, possibly, I could defer to the CEO or the Deputy CEO to talk on this particular issue, because a number of steps have been taken in relation to issues that you have raised - very important issues - to try to address the situation. I ask the CEO or the Deputy CEO to respond.

Mr SHANAHAN: We are proposing to swap rooms to the one next door. That is the first proposal. There is an interview room adjacent to it but in the same area of the court. The proposal is to swap rooms when we do the new works on the video system. There was also an issue around accessing the courts through that separate entrance. As we understand it, there is now an intercom system that is being installed, so people can use an intercom system up to the court registry or the reception area. We can remotely unlock that door to allow people to come through. There was an issue in that there was no key to the vulnerable witness room and that has been resolved. The court staff have the key but, whilst people do not have the key, they can ask for it and be given the key when they need it.

There was an issue around the proximity to the robing cupboards. I understand that they have since been moved away from that area. The issue with the toilet, though, is not quite that simple. If we build the toilet, it would mean it would have to take up an area in the victims' area. If you are going to build it there, then you would be taking up valuable space that would be used for people just to mingle around the place, which would mean that they would have to hang around the main foyer of the court again. One of the reasons why we put those areas together was to keep the victims away from the offenders and various family groups that might be involved. So, there are some issues around that.

I understand they are going to take some steps among the court orderlies to try to facilitate movement of people to make it a bit easier. However, at this stage, it is not likely that we will be going ahead and building the toilet.

Ms CARNEY: Will the room be much bigger?

Mr SHANAHAN: My understanding is, not much at all. There are some other alternatives, which we have been looking at, where more space is needed. There are a couple of rooms upstairs that might be used for people who are there for a longer period. But that, again, would require some special measures being taken by our staff to accommodate that.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I reckon I have been waiting for close to 10 years, under the last government and this one, for this area to be fixed up. I will not be holding my breath, with great respect, but it sounds as though a couple of things are being fixed up. Who is the expert that you have retained?

Mr SHANAHAN: Rod Louey-Gung.

Ms CARNEY: Who is that?

Mr SHANAHAN: He is Integrated Media ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry?

Mr SHANAHAN: Integrated Media consultants. They have done all the videoconferencing for the electronic court ...

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so he is a techno ...

Mr SHANAHAN: He is a techno person.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Have you spoken to any other people who might call themselves, or be described by others, as experts in terms of what is needed in the vulnerable witness room; that is, those from WA's DPP?

Mr SHANAHAN: Apparently we have been liaising with the DPP; we have been sent a memo suggesting a number of changes and we are going to adopt most of them. We are also talking to another information technology expert, I am told.

Ms CARNEY: Great. That is a good memo, I reckon, if it is the one I am thinking of. All right, I will leave it at that, thank you and, no doubt, we will revisit this next year.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any further questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Court Support. Minister, I have raised it before and I will probably keep raising it. I believe the jury payment system is unfair for people, especially contractors and people who run small businesses or who work for themselves. They simply do not get sufficient pay to cover the costs they need to close their business down or employ another person. A person in the public service or working for a large company is able to be given time to work on a jury without loss of pay. Will the government consider a better form of payment for people in those positions to attract them to the jury service? It is not that those people do not want to serve on a jury; it is simply very difficult when you are a single business person or a small business person or a contractor.

Dr BURNS: It is a very good point, member for Nelson. I am advised that there has been an increase in the standard fee for trials that last 10 or more days. It has been increased to \$120 per day and people can access another \$30 per day if they can demonstrate they have suffered financial loss. I am not sure that we are ever going to solve this problem. If people in certain professions are to be put on jury duty, I am not sure how we could recompense some of those people. Maybe I could defer to the CEO as well about that. There has been an increase, but I take what you say; it is still not going to be enough for some people.

He has nothing to add.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I accept that there was at least a raising of the dollar value. That is only for trials 10 days and over, so, someone dealing with a trial 10 days and under does not get much money. Also, if you are on the waiting list before you are selected, you will see the amount is a pittance. It is a very low amount before you are selected and you are asked to wait to see whether you would be selected for the trial. It is a very small amount. It is simply very difficult for many people to do that. They lose money, whereas people in the public service or if you are working for BHP or big oil companies, it is not a problem.

Dr BURNS: I have a document that makes some comparisons between states and territories. I am more than happy to table that. You can see that, in many instances, we are above what other jurisdictions pay. I would like to table that please, Madam Deputy Chair.

Mr WOOD: I suggest, minister, that the problem is that in many other jurisdictions there are a lot of people. So, it is easier for people in that predicament to get out of working on the jury. We live in a place where there is only a small population. Therefore, there is relatively fewer people who can be selected. I have known people who have been asked, and asked and asked, who keep trying to be exempted. It is not quite comparing apples with apples.

Dr BURNS: As you are aware, we did change the rules about allowing people - I think over 65 is it? Prior to that people who were over 65 could not serve on juries. Government has changed that rule to increase the pool of available jurors. Those people also have a bit of wisdom to offer, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: They probably do. I understand where the government is coming from, but I know that it is an issue. It is an issue throughout Australia but, in areas of small population it is an even bigger issue. Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 - Lower Courts and Tribunals

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: I did, but let us go to the next one, shall we?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: And the next one after that.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Have we had 2.4 yet?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 - Fines Recovery Unit

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I did have quite a few questions in this but, in the interests of time, I might write you a letter incorporating my questions, thank you. So, nothing today.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Output 2.3, Fines Recovery?

Mr WOOD: A very quick question. Page 49 of the annual report varies, for some reason, from page 168 of the budget. I was wondering if someone could explain why there is a variation in the same column. I am referring to 2007-08 estimates. The annual report talks about revenue collected for the Territory government of \$8.47m and the budget talks about \$8.32m; for the non-Territory government entities, the annual reports says \$1m and the budget says \$0.71m; and from enforcement fees it says \$0.64m, and in the budget that one stays the same.

Dr BURNS: I will ask Dr Dreier to respond.

Dr DREIER: Certainly. The performance measures which you are talking about, Mr Wood, in Budget Paper No 3, there is an estimate under the 2007-08 heading. That estimate is based on actual data received, at least for the first half of the financial year; possibly the first three-quarters of the financial year, extrapolated through to the end of the year. The data that you are looking at in the annual report is actual data for the full year. You will find that it would be pretty much unlikely, or fairly unlikely, that the figures would come in to the cent because in one instance you are making an estimate going forward, which is what happens in your performance measures; in your annual report, you are looking back retrospectively to what you received through the year.

Mr WOOD: If I was to read the 2007-08 estimate in the annual report under column 'Estimate', it is different to the 2007-08 estimate in the budget?

Ms CARNEY: They usually are.

Dr DREIER: That is right.

Mr WOOD: They usually are?

Dr DREIER: When the annual report is done, it is done in about August of the year. Therefore, where you have the estimate in here, they are looking forward. That is based on a full year's data. They are

looking forward to the next year. When this estimate for 2007-08 is done as it appears in Budget Paper No 3, it is based on about half a year's actual data. Again, it is comparing apples and pears.

Mr WOOD: Okay. Thank you, that is all.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, any further questions? No? That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Registrar-General

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.4, Registrar-General. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.4.

Output 2.5 – Public Trustee

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.5, Public Trustee. Are there any questions?

Members: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.5.

Output 2.6 – Information Commissioner

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.6, Information Commissioner. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. Many, but I will see if I can wrap them all up in one. Minister, I am not sure if you noticed but, for most of what was contained in Budget Paper No 3 in this area, it was exactly the same as last year's. The number of applications was the same as the previous year. The number of general inquiries, 360, is identical to the previous year's. Time spent on policy assistance, 550, identical to the previous year's - and so it goes on. I am just wondering what am I missing that it is so identical? Or would a cynic say that there is strangely little information in this area, which is ironic given that it is the Information Commissioner?

Dr BURNS: Well, that could be a cynical view ...

Ms CARNEY: Could be.

Dr BURNS: ... but one explanation may be that the complaints and inquiries, etcetera, are fairly static in this area. However, I will defer to Dr Dreier on this issue.

Dr DREIER: The same question hit my mind when I read the first draft of this. We actually spent a fair bit of time going through with the Information Commissioner. It does hit just about right on the knocker. Perhaps they are very good forecasters, I am not sure, but there you go.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. Like a hole in one. I see you have your golf tie again. You wear that tie every year.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration Output 2.6.

Output 2.7 – Consumer Affairs

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.7, Consumer Affairs. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.7.

Output 2.8 – Anti-Discrimination Commission

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.8, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Mr WOOD: No.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.8.

Output 2.9 – Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.9, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you. Gangs, minister. I would like to know how many prosecutions there have been under section 47B of the *Summary Offences Act*. Can you tell me?

Dr BURNS: I have some information on what you have requested ...

Ms CARNEY: If you have it for tabling purposes, that would be ...

Dr BURNS: It is just a written note. It is an e-mail really, but it just gives the information that is required. Gang legislation commenced in December 2006. We have data from the commencement to the 31 December 2007, which is the first 13 months of operation of the legislation. Over this period from December 2006 to 31 December 2007, police recorded 173 apprehensions related to gang offences. These apprehensions may also include other non-gang offences. Of the 173 apprehensions reported, 89% related to indigenous people. Of the 173 apprehensions, 95%, or 164, proceeded to court. I am prepared to table this.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could I have that figure again?

Dr BURNS: Out of the 173, 95%, or 164 proceeded to court.

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Dr BURNS: Of those cases proceeding to court, 49%, or 80 were finalised by 31 December 2007, and 51%, or 84, were pending finalisation. I will table this, member for Araluen, if the tabling clerk wants to bring it over to you. Of the 80 finalised cases, 83%, or 66, were convicted, and 18%, or 14, were not convicted. Of the 66 convictions, 44%, or 29, received a custodial sentence, and 56%, or 37, received a non-custodial sentence. That is a snapshot of what is happening. It is showing a substantial number are going to the courts, a substantial number of those are going to gaol, and that is the way it should be.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Obviously, lots of numbers there, so that document will be interesting to have a look at.

Dr BURNS: The CEO would like to add something, if that is all right, member for Araluen?

Mr SHANAHAN: The sections that the people were prosecuted under were the three you mentioned.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, so you have given me the details for 47AA and 55A in that document?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes. That covers the whole.

Ms CARNEY: Great, thank you.

Dr BURNS: Although it does not specifically say it on that written document, but that is the information that the CEO has given. On the bit of paper that is there, he is qualifying it saying that his advice to us is that it relates to those sections that you named before.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. In 2005, government made changes to the *Bail Act*. The changes were designed to remove the entitlement to bail for people who had a history of serious repeat offending. How many bail applications have been opposed successfully by the DPP or Summary Prosecutions in the last 12 months?

Dr BURNS: I will have to take that on notice, member for Araluen.

Question on Notice No 5.12

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question?

Ms CARNEY: In 2005, government made changes to the *Bail Act*. The changes were designed to remove the entitlement to bail for people who have a history of serious repeat offending. How many bail applications were successfully opposed by the DPP and/or summary prosecutions in the last 12 months?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take the question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.12.

Dr BURNS: Hold on, could we just let the CEO respond to this, because I think he has some information about whose responsibility this is in terms of this data, or the deputy CEO.

Ms MORRIS: We also need to clarify the question, member for Araluen, whether you mean only those bail applications that are related to the changes in 2005 or every single bail application?

Ms CARNEY: Can we do both? Let us live a little.

Ms MORRIS: We will need to take whether or not we can actually answer that question on notice. Police prosecution statistics in relation to that are held by the police in relation to bail applications opposed.

Ms CARNEY: Well, summary prosecutions within the DPP or the Department of Justice.

Mr SHANAHAN: Summary Prosecutions, as I understand it, is still with police, though they are located with us, they do that for convenience. The DPP will do some of the more complicated matters in the Magistrates Court, but they do not do all the matters in the Magistrates Court, nor do they report them all.

Ms CARNEY: The document you provided in relation to prosecutions under those sections of the *Summary Offences Act* were presumably done by Summary Prosecutions not the DPP. Why is it that you can provide me with that information but not the answer?

Dr BURNS: I will call on the CEO to respond to that please.

Mr SHANAHAN: That comes from our stats unit interrogating IJIS. The information from IJIS, I would not think, would give you the detail.

Ms CARNEY: IJIS does not do bail applications.

Mr SHANAHAN: Does not tell which ones are opposed, which ones are not. I think it is for offences like that. You would need to look at the files. So, I am not quite sure.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, can we do it like this? How many bail applications were opposed successfully in the last 12 months and you will give me the DPP. Can we do that?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: So are we changing that question?

Ms CARNEY: I think we are going to have to.

Ms MORRIS: Excuse me, member for Araluen. That is in relation to all of the offences that have come before the court, not just those bail applications where your presumption is reversed for serious violence?

Ms CARNEY: Let us make it the latter and just the latter. The reason I am pursuing this is what we see is government issuing media releases and coming up with policy responses and, then, things just seem to be going into the abyss. We need to, and you as a government need to, monitor the success or otherwise of your reforms.

Dr BURNS: You are not referring to our court system as an abyss, member for Araluen?

Ms CARNEY: No, certainly not, minister.

Question on Notice No 5.12 - reallocated

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: What I would like to do now is reallocate that same question number that if you could please restate it exactly as you like.

Ms CARNEY: Exactly. How many bail applications were successfully opposed in the last 12 months in relation to the changes made in 2005 to the *Bail Act*?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you still prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will reallocate that question as No 5.12.

Ms CARNEY: How many apprehensions - you referred to some in a couple of answers ago, minister - of the 173 apprehensions related directly to the gang package in 2005. Do you remember the gang package? The package of reforms - the government will shut down youth gangs - those ones?

Dr BURNS: Those gang measures were 2006. I will take advice on this, but just speaking more generally you have raised questions about what government and police are doing in terms of gangs. I have given a fairly specific answer about gangs and gang-related offences in my answers. I have given you some statistics. I am not sure whether we can dig down further as to what you are asking exactly.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, what about this? How many prosecutions have there been in relation to changes made to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Group Criminal Activities) Bill in August 2006?

Dr BURNS: Yes, we believe we may be able to do that. Ms Morris is taking advice at this stage. When she is ready we will proceed.

Ms MORRIS: The information that we have passed up before: are all prosecutions made under those sections which were amended, adjusted or introduced as part of the passages ...

Ms CARNEY: Were there other sections? There were no others in addition to sections 47 and 55?

Ms MORRIS: And the other one, yes.

Ms CARNEY: So, it was just those ones, those three sections of the *Summary Offences Act*?

Ms MORRIS: Yes, the other ones contained in the information ...

Dr BURNS: Pretty impressive statistics.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry?

Dr BURNS: I think they are showing this legislation is working and the people are being put behind bars, being brought to the courts, for this sort of activity. That is exactly the intention of government.

Ms CARNEY: I know it is the intention of government, minister ...

Dr BURNS: I believe those figures clearly show that the intention of government is not falling into the abyss ...

Ms CARNEY: ... but I am always keen to have a look at the figures and see how government proposes to monitor it.

Dr BURNS: ... but, rather, the ones that are falling into the abyss are the perpetrators of this gang-related violence and the abyss they are falling into is the prison.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, if we can get to Corrections? I know the member for Nelson wants to talk about Corrections, as do I.

I will have a look at the tabled document then I will determine whether it is as good as you do.

Minister, in August 2005, changes were made to the *Youth Justice Act*; they were also made to the *Youth Justice Act* in recent times. One of the changes made in 2005 is detailed in the then Attorney-General's media release of 24 August, which said that under the act: 'maximum sentences will be doubled for offenders who are 15 and older'. In the last 12 months, how many offenders who are 15 and older have been given the maximum sentence of two years?

Dr BURNS: I will take advice on that, member for Araluen. We may have to take on notice, member for Araluen.

Question on Notice No 5.13

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Araluen, for the purposes of *Hansard*, can you please restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: I will, but I am genuinely stunned that you do not have the figures for estimates, given the vigour with which the government pursued those changes in 2005 and the promises that were made in respect of them. You do not have the figures in relation to your much well-publicised ...

Dr BURNS: With all respect, member for Araluen, you have changed from the beginning of this estimates process to commending the public servants and the work that they do ...

Ms CARNEY: I am talking to you, minister.

Dr BURNS: ... and the information that is put forward. I am saying that you have asked a very specific question.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I have.

Dr BURNS: We have undertaken to give you the answer. We are not trying to block you in any way. We will try to get that answer before the close of business. If that is not possible, we will get it to you as quickly as we can. We are endeavouring to facilitate this process. There has been a very cooperative spirit throughout this estimates hearing, and I would like it to continue.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you. Can I just say, by expressing surprise it is not a reflection on your staff. I am genuinely surprised, given the emphasis by your government and all of its associated publicity, that you do not, as an Attorney-General, have the details.

I will ask the question to be put on notice as follows: In the last 12 months, how many offenders who are 15 and older have been given maximum sentence of two years as a result of changes made to the *Youth Justice Act* in 2005?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr BURNS: I am, Madam Deputy Chair.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 5.13.

Ms CARNEY: I will leave it there, thanks, minister, only because I know the member for Nelson wants to get to Corrections. I have some Corrections too, but I will forgo them. I also know that Mr Mills would like to get to some other areas. I will cut and run. Thank you, everyone, once again.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? That concludes consideration Output 2.9 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 - CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Output 3.1 - Custodial Services

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Correctional Services, Output 3.1, Custodial Services. Are there any questions? Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. I will do my best to keep a very important part of estimates short. Minister, why did the government not consider building several low-security prisons throughout the Northern Territory - perhaps prison farms - to reduce the amount of overcrowding in the existing Berrimah prison, as well as giving opportunities for employment in those areas?

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, it is an important question. I am on the public record a number of times saying the government considered a range of options including some low-security facilities in regional areas of the Territory. However, for a whole range of reasons, it was decided that we would take the option of a 1000-bed greenfields site in Darwin.

Part of the consideration around that is about reducing recidivism amongst prisoners and providing education to those prisoners. Many of these prisoners cannot read and write properly, which is an incredible handicap for them to be trained and find employment. The budget going forward within Corrections is going to really focus on creating those sorts of educational opportunities.

In terms of prison farms and people doing horticulture and agriculture, and pastoral work, I believe a greenfields site will provide some opportunities for prisoners who might be that way inclined to pursue those particular interests. However, there are quite a number of opportunities for prisoners, and that is why government has decided to go the way that it has in our decision to go with the option of a 1000-bed facility on a greenfields site.

Mr WOOD: Minister, surely, if you put in some regional prisons, you could also include educational facilities in each of those areas, which would create employment for those regions, as well as doing what you said - it is very important that prisoners are educated - as well as perhaps - and I put this to parliament before - using the opportunity which may involve a commercial business, to run prison farms to supply many of the remote communities in the Northern Territory, most of which do not have gardens. I do not believe that the local government reform process which includes horticulture will work. There is an opportunity there for that to occur, by having a range of prison farms throughout the Northern Territory.

Dr BURNS: In answer to your question, one element that was considered by government was in relation to the stability of the workforce and recruitment of the workforce in these regional centres. I have said publicly that, even in a centre like Alice Springs, it is often problematic to recruit and retain prison staff, and that would be exacerbated in an area like Tennant Creek or Katherine.

There are also issues around the recurrent funding and the capital costs of going that way. We decided to concentrate our educational efforts in the major facilities, and I believe that that is appropriate. I know you do not agree with it, but there are many options in reducing recidivism.

You are very focused on the option of having prison farms and supply of food and whatever. Looking at the history of these sorts of undertakings - and you were involved with the Tiwi, etcetera - the only functional garden that I know about, say, in the Top End, is at Yirrkala.

One of these days, we will sit down and talk about this. I commend Syd Kyle-Little's book *Whispering Wind* to you. Syd Kyle-Little was an Aboriginal patrol officer in the 1950s. He talked about this very issue of Aboriginal people and market gardens. I suppose many of the missions had market gardens in those days. He pointed a way forward and put some views which you might find interesting. I believe it is still probably pertinent today. We might just have to agree to disagree on this particular issue.

Mr WOOD: I would love to debate that more, because you know I ran two gardens ...

Dr BURNS: I know you did.

Mr WOOD: ... and I know there are big issues about getting people to work seven days a week. However, there is one thing you will find in a prison: you can get people to work seven days a week because they have nowhere else to go. We do not have the time to debate that right through.

Minister, you mentioned the greenfields site. Berrimah prison is right next to Berrimah Farm. If the land that Berrimah prison is on at the present is not suitable, as I have heard - and I do not agree with that because the government says it is going to use it for housing - why could it not build on Berrimah prison site? I presume that the government is not going to put housing under the flight path and the prison is already next to the flight path as it is. Why can it not use that site if it cannot use its existing site, instead of going out somewhere - you are not going to tell me - to one of the three sites that you are thinking about, which could create some difficulties. I do not think people are going to be happy if there is a prison close by their residences. Why can you not leave it either where it is, or move it slightly away from where it is, and not create a problem anywhere else? Where it is at the moment is not a problem. It may be a little difficult trying to redo the prison, whether you redevelop it or pull it down, but there is about 100 acres of prison land. If that is not suitable, there is all of Berrimah Farm which the government is going to cut up. Why can it not stay where it is?

Dr BURNS: We have been through this on the floor of parliament a number of times. The advice that government has is that it is preferable to go to a greenfields site. It is very difficult to construct or reconstruct a gaol and have a construction site on a gaol site. Government has made a policy decision and you do not agree with it. However, government has made that decision about Berrimah Farm and the subdivision there. Furthermore, government is determined that the land the gaol currently sits on would be available for residential development.

In terms of the flight path, I am not aware of that issue. That is probably something you should have addressed to the minister for Planning. I am not sure exactly which noise contour that fits into, but I am sure that would have been looked at in the deliberations by Lands and Planning.

Mr WOOD: I did raise it. I am saying that this land is probably not suitable for residential land. It comes under the flight path, and I have the maps to show that. Why that land could not be used for a prison farm - I still think the prison farm - which was mentioned in the CAYA report, for some reason, not accepted by the government ...

Dr BURNS: Is not that area you are pointing to Robbie Robbins Reserve?

Mr WOOD: No. Robbie Robbins is here. And they will not let you touch theirs. I hope you are not going to take their bit of land out.

Dr BURNS: We love Robbie Robbins Reserve.

Mr WOOD: That is right. There is plenty of land here. You are close to Darwin. You are not causing any problems. You could use land that is not suitable for residential. My problem is, it is badly planned. You are going to put residential there, and then say: 'Oh, that is no good. We will not be able to sell the land, so let us move the prison somewhere else', which might create a problem.

Dr BURNS: No. I have already said that government considered the option of a greenfields site and were advised that that was the best way to proceed in the staged construction of a new 1000-bed facility, and in the operational impacts of that at the current Berrimah gaol and the stepwise transfer of prisoners from that gaol. Whether the CEO or Mr Middlebrook wants to respond further to what you are talking about, I am not sure. No.

Mr WOOD: In the corner here, you have \$7.2m-worth of low-security prison. It has only been opened about a year-and-a-half. Are you saying that that would be demolished?

Dr BURNS: I am saying that there is a longer-term plan for the transfer of prisoners with time - I think 2012 is the date - and government will get further use out of the facilities at Berrimah. Some of the equipment and infrastructure at Berrimah, particularly some of the electronic surveillance equipment, I am advised, will be able to be used as part of the new gaol. That is the situation, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: This new site will be demolished? The brand new low-security prison will be demolished?

Dr BURNS: I am advised there will be no further use for it. In terms of the infrastructure itself, I will let the CEO speak to this as well.

Mr SHANAHAN: The situation with the LSU is that there has been no decision made on what its longer-term use would be. That is a government decision. There are no plans for it to be used as a prison.

Mr WOOD: All right. I believe that is just an absolute waste of money. Minister, can you tell us the three sites that you intend to move the prison to?

Dr BURNS: I can tell you that there is a cross-departmental committee examining various sites across the greater Darwin and Palmerston area. I have given assurances to the public that the new prison will not be located proximate to housing. I believe the work of that committee has already commenced, and they are going to be meeting in the coming months. I am not sure whether Dr Dreier, who is on that committee, has any further comment.

Dr DREIER: No, that summed it up.

Mr WOOD: I am not trying to drag public servants into this debate; I know it is a political decision. I think that it is the wrong decision. I will be on record as saying we have not thought laterally enough about this. It is an opportunity, I believe, to do something really good in the Territory; to move away from having just all - we have 80% indigenous people in our gaols. Most of them will be low-security to medium-security. Surely, we have an opportunity to help those people and train them, and provide some growth in regional areas. Tennant Creek was screaming out for this gaol. The member for Barkly asked the government to do something, so I am not on my own when I am saying this. I see that we are getting back to concrete and clay. Education is important, no doubt, but we have an opportunity to broaden our approach to prisoners. I thank the Director, Ken Middlebrook, for a walk through the prison the other day; I appreciated it. However, I do think that, sadly, this is the wrong decision.

Quickly, minister, because I know the member for Blain wants to talk about something else. Regarding the book, *Women in Prison* - and I did visit the prison a couple of years ago, and I did not raise as many issues as the Ombudsman did. Could you say how many of the recommendations - and what were they - that the department has already put into place? There was something on the radio saying a certain number of these have already been put into place. Could you say exactly what those recommendations are? There is a section here, minister, Recommendation 33. It says that the Department of Justice has taken 15 recommendations of the NT Legal Aid Commission 2006 Paper, *Managing Prisoner Growth in the NT*, into account when planning and prioritising projects, goals and funding support in the future. I tried to get hold of that report. I am told I need your permission. Is that report available for public scrutiny or, at least, can I find out what those 15 recommendations were?

Dr BURNS: It is a Legal Aid report, I am advised.

Mr WOOD: Legal Aid told me that they were reluctant to hand it over to me, because last time I asked for something, they said they got into trouble. They said I should ask you whether I can see those recommendations.

Dr BURNS: I will undertake to look into this issue. I do not know this particular report or what conditions there are around it. The government commissions reports and some of them are confidential, for all sorts of reasons. However, I will endeavour to look at this and, if it is possible, I will release the report. In terms of *Women in Prison* ...

Mr WOOD: You can give me the details of that later.

Dr BURNS: All right.

Mr WOOD: I have a number of important questions. When I was in Ohio to visit the Ohio Women's Reformatory, I noticed that women prisoners were allowed to take a child into the prison where they either

gave birth to the child or the child was extremely young. Is our department looking at the possibility - it may even be a recommendation here, I am not sure – of allowing an inmate, who either gives birth to a child whilst incarcerated or comes to prison with a young child, to be able to look after that child in prison? What I saw in Ohio is that, believe it or not, that child with its mother had a calming influence on the vast number of prisoners. It had a small nursery for that mother, and you found that other prisoners were willing to grandmother that child. There were some other great benefits, I thought, in having facilities which would allow a mother to look after the child in prison.

Dr BURNS: I am advised that women in prison with a child are able to keep it there until age five, but my CEO might elaborate.

Mr SHANAHAN: I understand that is our current position. In Alice Springs, the improvements that are being made there will have an area which will accommodate, or have provision for, children who are with their mothers.

Mr WOOD: That will happen in the Darwin correctional facility?

Mr SHANAHAN: That is the plan as well.

Mr WOOD: That is the plan, so it is not ...

Mr SHANAHAN: No, we need more facilities to make it. Yes, when I was in Alice last year, there was a child down there. It is the same as you said - the other inmates do take on a grandmotherly role.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I probably know what the answer is going to be, but I will ask this on record; in relation to pre-release programs for prisoners who are serving life sentences, at the present time, those prisoners who are serving a prison sentence - before the government brought in its new legislation which said that you are not eligible for parole until you are either classified as a 20-year prisoner or a 25-year prisoner - do not know what they are going to be classified as. Is it not a bad policy of the government to tell a prisoner, only at the very last minute, whether he is going to be a 20-year prisoner or a 25-year prisoner, in relation to giving a prisoner a chance to be involved in pre-release programs?

Dr BURNS: Once again, this is a policy decision by government. We decided that that was to be the case. I know there have been submissions by a whole range of people on this issue. I understand where they are coming from, but government has made this policy decision. I also add that the rule that is applied here is very simple, really. If someone has an aggravating aspect to the murder, such as a sexual offence, a murder of a child, or it is a multiple murder - there maybe others as well - they can expect to get 25 years at least. I expect that most of those prisoners, given that they have been reflecting for 19 years and they know what the rules are and they probably have contact with lawyers, would have a pretty fair idea about what they are going to get. That is my response.

Mr WOOD: Minister, do you not have, basically, two sets of prisoners - the ones who have come in after your legislation who would know where they would be in relation to the eligibility for parole, and another group who do not know when their eligibility for parole is? They might guess it, they might think it might happen, but no one - because it has to be done by the court I believe, has it?

Dr BURNS: There are applications that go before the court.

Mr WOOD: That is right. Why not, say, get that group of prisoners and do it? At least they all know ...

Dr BURNS: I say again that government determined that would be the case. Those prisoners would have a fair idea of what their term is going to be, and whether they are going to be eligible for parole at 20 years. I suppose the last thing to add is that at least they have a bit more certainty than they had before. Basically, they had been locked up and someone had thrown away the key. At least there is some light for them. I take what you say; there are two sets of prisoners. However, with time, it will become one set of prisoners.

Mr WOOD: All right, I do not quite agree with that 'with time'. They may be there forever and a day, in that particular point of view.

Dr BURNS: Well, if they are there forever and a day, they deserve to be there forever and a day.

Mr WOOD: I am not arguing whether they deserve or do not deserve, minister. I am saying that if we are serious about pre-release programs and that sort of thing, you need some certainty from prison management point of view, not just only the prisoner.

Dr BURNS: We will just have to agree to disagree. I corresponded with you on that, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I get a lot of that in my job, minister. I have many questions on the prison, but if there is ...

Mr MILLS: A question on work camps; does that fit in here? Work programs out in the community, does that fit in here? Do you have one on that?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, very much, Mr Wood.

How many work gangs have been operating this year - and I will give the whole deal because we only have a few minutes. Is it possible for information to be provided on the number of work gangs by community members – like how many people in the Territory - since 2001?

Dr BURNS: The information that I have is that there were three work gangs in Darwin and three in Alice Springs. In this budget, we have increased it to seven in Darwin and seven in Alice Springs, with a significant investment of money. I did request, when I became Corrections minister, because these work gangs help a lot of pensioners with their lawn mowing and demand was exceeding supply, that until I was able to secure the extra funding to increase the numbers of gangs - and that includes the infrastructure that they use, such as the vehicles and tools, etcetera - that the three existing gangs work on weekends to clear the backlog. I commend Corrections for agreeing with that and paying the overtime and providing the foundations for that. Now we can move forward with seven. I hope that answers your question.

Mr MILLS: Yes, it does to a degree. When did the seven come into play?

Dr BURNS: The seven will come into play as of 1 July. Possibly the CEO could give you further information, member for Blain.

Mr SHANAHAN: The new ones will be phased in, in the next couple of years.

Mr MILLS: The additional four?

Mr SHANAHAN: The additional ones, yes. They will be phased in over the next couple of years.

Mr MILLS: Can you be more specific on the phasing in schedule?

Mr SHANAHAN: In Alice Springs, there will be an additional one next year and an additional one the year after, and then two in 2010-11; and in Darwin, there will be an additional three next year and an additional one in 2010-11. It is based around the work that is available. Also, one of the ones in Darwin will be specifically for females, so we can go to that straightaway.

Mr MILLS: Right. That is why I would like to go back to look at work gangs, or the number of work gangs since 2001. Has it been three since 2001 - three per year in the Top End?

Dr BURNS: We will need to get that information for you, member for Blain.

Question on Notice No 5.14

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Can I have it from 2001, the number of work gangs in operation in the Northern Territory in each of these areas?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, are you prepared to take that on notice?

Dr BURNS: We will take that on notice.

Mr MILLS: Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 5.14.

Mr MILLS: Finally, the system by which a work gang is provided or directed to a project in a community. Could you describe that for us, minister?

Dr BURNS: Ken Middlebrook, the director, is coming forward. Please identify yourself, Ken, and address the issue raised by the member for Blain.

Mr MIDDLEBROOK: Ken Middlebrook, Executive Director NT Correctional Services. What normally happens is that the people wanting the work done write to the Superintendent and there is a departmental policy for the criteria set for the sort of work that can be done. All work is done for non-profit organisations.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. What role does the local member play in this system that you have described?

Mr MIDDLEBROOK: Local members often refer pensioners and other disadvantaged people of the community with projects such as lawn mowing. These sorts of work are referred from the local member to the Superintendent of the Prisons.

Mr MILLS: Has the issue been corrected where, a couple of years ago, there was this arrangement made which included only government MLAs?

Dr BURNS: I will take that question, member for Blain. You are making an allegation which is unsubstantiated.

Mr MILLS: I can substantiate it. I just want to know whether that has now been addressed so that it is a completely open system.

Dr BURNS: I am not aware of it, member for Blain, and you have never raised it with me or publicly.

Mr MILLS: No. It has been raised and, I understand, it has been addressed. I want to ensure it has been.

Dr BURNS: It is an allegation ...

Mr MILLS: It can be substantiated, do not worry about that.

Dr BURNS: I worry about a lot of things the opposition says because, over time, I have been burned a couple of times by things that have been said. I could rattle them right off here, and when I have looked into it, it is not so. If you have an allegation ...

Mr MILLS: Let us have a private chat afterwards. All I want ...

Dr BURNS: ... you are able to substantiate, well, come forward with it.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Let us pause for a moment to acknowledge that the member for Goyder has been replaced by the member for Macdonnell.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. I just want to ensure that the process which involves the local members is a clean system that shows no differentiation between a government and non-government MLA.

Dr BURNS: I am advised, member for Blain, that this allegation has never been raised with Corrections or through Justice or through me. I just think it is a political question. You are just trying to get some sort of media coverage on this and you have not substantiated it.

Mr MILLS: You will not see anything in the paper on this; I will not be putting it in. Anyway, we will leave that there ...

Dr BURNS: I will give you the assurance that it is an open and transparent process. If you have any problems in referral of people in your electorate, I will certainly take up any issues that you raise with me, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: The issue was a past issue. I just wanted to know that with this new system, that matter has been comprehensively addressed so it will not occur again. That is all. It is before your time, so you can relax about it rather than wasting time.

Dr BURNS: I have said all I can say, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: I know you have. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay. Are there any further questions on that output? Member for Nelson, we need to put that question on notice about the recommendations?

Mr WOOD: About the recommendations. Minister, can I put that on notice?

Dr BURNS: I have those.

Mr WOOD: You have them there, have you? Do you have the answers there, or do I put it on notice?

Dr BURNS: Yes, put it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.15

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, for the purposes of *Hansard*, would you please restate your question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, would you be able to provide a list of recommendations accepted so far by your department in relation to the Ombudsman's report

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept that question?

Dr BURNS: I accept that. We will provide our response to those recommendations, recommendation by recommendation.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I will allocate that question No 5.15.

Answer to Question on Notice No 5.11

Dr BURNS: Madam Deputy Chair, I have an answer in relation to question No 5.11 asked by the member for Nelson about Newcastle Waters and the Polygon claim. I will table this advice. The matter involved six separate native title determination claims over two pastoral leases within the Barkly Region: Newcastle Waters Station and Murrarji Station over the town of Newcastle Waters. There was an agreed test case in that it concerned the first native title claim over contemporary functioning pastoral leases.

On 26 September 2007, the Federal Court handed down its determination on this matter. In summary, the determination provides that exclusive native title rights exist in the town of Newcastle Waters, with the exception of 19 areas, and that non-exclusive native title rights - that is, right to travel over land to hunt and fish, and to gather and to use natural resources to live, camp and erect shelters - exist in relation to the pastoral lease areas, the subject of the proceedings. That is the advice that I have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. That now concludes this session. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending, as well as all officers who have provided advice to the minister today.

Dr BURNS: In closing, I also thank the Department of Justice for their comprehensive briefings to me, and for the way in which they have been able to give information to this committee, which is a very positive thing. It is a big job and I thank them, on behalf of members - I am sure they join with me - for the wonderful work that you have done and the details that you provided us. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER VATSKALIS' PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr CHAIRMAN: Welcome, everyone. Thank you for attending this evening. Minister, I will invite you to introduce the officials that you have with you, and also to make a brief opening statement, for no more than five minutes, on behalf of the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am pleased to make a short opening statement, as you said, in my capacity as Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Defence Support. This session also covers my ministerial responsibilities for the Land Development Corporation. I would like to introduce Mr David Malone, Acting Chief Executive and Executive Director of Regional Development; Ms Noelene Biddell, the Chief Financial Officer; Mr John Coleman, who is the Acting Executive Director of Business and Industry Development, and also General Manager for Land Development Corporation; Mr Ian Prince, Acting Executive Director Economic Development; and Mr John Huigen, Chief Executive of Desert Knowledge Australia, all the way from Alice Springs. Other departmental officials will be introduced if they are required to provide supplementary evidence. I plan to address the major policy matters, while David and the team will be able to add further on operational aspects of the department, its services and programs. I should also note, as we move through to my other portfolio responsibilities, I may make some further remarks and introduce agency staff.

Mr Chairman, I am very pleased to advise the committee again this year that the Territory's economy is very strong, and business and consumer confidence remain high. Of course, as you know, this does not just happen by accident. Employment is growing, retail trade continues to be strong, and construction activity remains relatively high. Sustaining Territory economic and industry development remains vital, and a strong growing Territory economy is essential for our future.

The continuing development of the Territory's regions remains crucial. Our long-term economic future depends on achieving development throughout the Territory. It depends on ensuring that Territorians, no matter where they live - in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine or Borroloola - have a reasonable opportunity to participate in the benefits of the Territory's economic growth and development. The Territory economy is doing well, but much more remains to be done. As outlined in the Territory budget for the department, we plan to continue to work with Territory business around a wide range of areas. Together, I expect we can continue to make real tangible progress in the coming year.

I look forward to take questions from the committee and, when necessary, Mr Malone and his team will be able to assist with additional detail of policy and other information.

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

Mrs MILLER: No, thank you, Mr Chairman.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Output 1.1 - Regional Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 as they relate to the Department of Business Economic and Regional Development. I will now call for questions relating to Output Group 1.0, Economic Development, Output 1.1, Regional Development. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Can we ask general questions?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, general questions are at the end. This is specifically for the output.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, do you want me to keep going through the Chair?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am happy for you to. We will take it that you are.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, the variation in the budget 2008-09 is \$143 000. What is that targeted for?

Mr VATSKALIS: The \$143 000 key components of that increase are a carryover from the business development program grant funding of \$200 000. The carryover of native title funding is \$250 000. The

nett carryover of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Economic Development offices funding is \$146 000; less \$100 000 funding for battery repairs and maintenance in 2007-08; repairing the mine in Tennant Creek of \$250 000, and less one additional Department of Education, Employment and workplace-related funding in 2007-08 of \$205 000. So, the nett outcome is an increase of \$143 000.

Mrs MILLER: So, they are actually carryovers from last year.

Mr VATSKALIS: Some of them are carryovers, some of them are one-off funding; for example, the repairs of the mine we had at Battery Hill in Tennant Creek, which required some repairs to remain operational. Altogether, the result is a nett increase of \$143 000.

Mrs MILLER: While we are on the subject of the Battery Hill mine. What did you do to the Battery Hill mine?

Mr VATSKALIS: An inspection by the department of Mines indicated the mine had deteriorated and needed some work on it to remain safe. It is one of the main attractions in Tennant Creek. The government reacted immediately providing the funding, to a company that specialised in this kind of stabilisation of mines. I am very pleased to say the mine is reopened.

Mrs MILLER: Was it closed for very long?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was closed for a few weeks. The faults were detected very quickly and we were fortunate enough for that company to be in the region at the time; so we hired their expertise and immediately commenced the repairs.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Why have the performance measures in this year's budget changed so dramatically - the performance measures compared to last year?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Mr Malone to respond to that.

Mr MALONE: David Malone, Acting Chief Executive, Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development. The performance measures are varied to move toward consistent arrangements similar to what the Department of Chief Minister and Treasury have used, in identifying the capacity to deliver services and, in addition, key projects the department is working on. It provides greater transparency, in our view, for what we are on about.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how is regional development better than before, as you give no indication of success or failure when there is no benchmark to measure against? You are saying it is better than before, but I have no benchmark in last year's papers to say this is better.

Mr MALONE: The regional development undertakes a range of different activities through the year, some of which are ongoing activities such as the services we provide to entrepreneurs and businesses throughout the Territory on a regular basis. On top of that, we focus on delivering particular projects that come along in a particular time. An example of that is the Battery Hill mineshaft and the Tennant Creek foundation projects, which is linked to the mineshaft repairs. In our annual report each year, we identify the key projects we work on. We also identify the grants that are provided to both indigenous businesses and regional organisations. So, that information is available.

The reality of our activity is that we do upwards of 150 to 200 different activities across the Territory at any one time. Some are quite modest. We are now working with micro-enterprise, for example. Some are quite significant, as we saw in Katherine recently. As a result of that, it is difficult to portray the breadth of work that we do, other than graphically.

Mrs MILLER: Are you going to be able to portray it a bit better next year? Or are we going to ask this every year?

Mr MALONE: The best solution is to present the information graphically, and to present it in the annual report format rather than the budget papers.

Mrs MILLER: We will not go out and ask the particular regions if they think they are better than before?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, you know very well we are committed to regional development. As Mr Malone mentioned, recently, the Sirolli project in Katherine was one of many to commence. It is a clear indication we are trying to help the regions. In other areas, too, not only in the regions. We assist people who want to develop tourism or small business enterprises. We help very adequately. If I can show you, as Mr Malone said, graphically we can actually better portray what we are doing. On this small map, you can see the areas where we are actively involved. Where you see a circle, we are the leading agency. Where you see a triangle, we are participants. The different colours indicate different activities. For example, regional economic development funds the indigenous Economic Development Committees. You can see this one is concentrating in Darwin. A majority of them are outside Darwin in other areas - from the McArthur River project in Borroloola to other enterprises in Katherine, Mataranka and Alice Springs.

Mrs MILLER: I feel like this is Question Time and you did that for media, and they are not even here.

Mr VATSKALIS: Just for you, just for you.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, are you able to provide a much smaller version of that, to table?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will be able to provide you with an A3 version of this. I am happy to table it.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. I am going to ask some more questions about the Sirolli institute later. Minister, there was a lot of trepidation when you introduced regional Economic Development Committees. I was one of them who thought: 'Oh no, not another damn committee'. Within Katherine, it was seen that the Chamber of Commerce did a lot of work for the region. You had your business development officer there. All of a sudden, we had a regional Economic Development Committee. What was their role? I do not perceive that the regional Economic Development Committee in Katherine feel they have been taken seriously. I do not know how the others do around the Territory. What positive development recommendations have come out of any of the regional Economic Development Committees you have taken on board? Can you name them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, we have Economic Development Committees because they are the people who know the region best. I said before in Alice Springs that I am not going to give solutions to your problems because I know some of your problems; but the reality is that I live in Darwin. Therefore, the solutions need to come from the people living in the region first. The other thing is people living in the region know their own capacity, their own problems, their own solutions and their own possibilities. We take them very seriously.

I have to say that I have some very good people working in the Economic Development Committee with a lot of credibility. John Leo in Alice Springs is one of them. I have had the pleasure of knowing John from my previous life, and I respect him. Other people on the Economic Development Committee in Alice Springs are fantastic. As you would probably remember, last year, the profile for Katherine was launched at the Katherine Show, which actually came through the cooperation of the Economic Development Committee with my department. That is because we both worked for the same target.

Very recently, I launched the economic profile for Alice Springs. Once again, it was a cooperative project between the Economic Development Committee in Alice Springs and the department. The Economic Development Committees are able to provide all this information and we are able to provide the support to Economic Development Committees. After all, this information and advice I get from committees is what I base my decisions on when considering how to proceed with certain projects in the area. The Sirolli project is a very good example. If we did not take the Economic Development Committees seriously, do you really think I would have two members of that committee as directors in the company we established? No. However, because we trusted and regarded them favourably, we made sure these people were inside a corporate entity that we created to further the Sirolli project.

Mrs MILLER: I have never, for a moment, suggested that any of the members who are on those regional Economic Development Committees were not of the highest profile and with the highest respect, because they are ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mrs MILLER: ... and they always have been. Especially because I know them personally in Katherine, I can speak more for Katherine. I have never had a doubt about that.

The regional Economic Development Committee in Katherine put forward a very good case to you in relation to establishing a low- to medium-security prison in Katherine. Tennant Creek has done exactly the same. The comment passed to me after that was just knocked on the head completely for anywhere regional in the Northern Territory was: 'I think they just gave us something to do for a short time to make us look like we were actually contributing to something. They had absolutely no intention of it ever going out into a regional area'. Could you confirm or deny that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely not. I say that because we do not just give something to people to do. What we wanted was for people to suggest different options. One of the options they probably considered was a prison. However, despite the fact it is not my portfolio, it is the minister for Justice's – and you have to ask this question of him. The prisons were an option; the development of abattoirs was another one. You have abattoirs in Alice Springs and currently, they are not operational. Development of micro-business and micro-developments in the rural area was yet another, and micro-tourism and indigenous tourism enterprises.

It was not only one task we gave the Economic Development Committees. We discussed a variety of issues. I let them select what they were going to focus on. The decision about the prisons was not made by my department. There were a number of issues, in fact, considered before the decision was made. This recommendation was considered and the decision was made not to put a prison in Katherine or Tennant Creek, but somewhere around Darwin for various reasons. As I said before, this does not come under my portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: But it would have been discussed in Cabinet because it is a really significant infrastructure development. I believe Katherine and Tennant Creek put forward very good cases. It would have been a significant major infrastructure development and, the sad thing is, here we are vying for a prison. That is how desperate we all are in regional areas to have some major infrastructure. We considered the economic benefits to Katherine - Tennant Creek did the same: employment, more families coming in, it offered traineeships, it offered a whole variety of things - desperate things the regions are crying out for.

I am looking at you because you are the minister. I have called you the minister for Katherine affectionately for a while. It did not work because we did not get a prison. However, that is the sort of thing that both regions were fighting for, because of the diverse range of things we are looking for to keep a major infrastructure development in our regions. The micro things - not a problem, we can work on those. Micro is simple. The major is what we need in both regions. You can understand why a lot of those members in the Economic Development Committee felt like it was a waste of time making that suggestion and trying so hard to get that in Katherine or Tennant Creek.

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said before, this is not my portfolio. What is my portfolio is Regional Development. I considered a major development on behalf of the Jawoyn - the proposal to put a four-and-a-half star motel in the Gorge there. I consider that to be good, and I will support it. Recently, I strongly supported the Chinese group who came from China to four-wheel drive from Kakadu to Uluru. They had to have a stopover in Katherine, they had to visit the Gorge - which they did and I believe they left quite a bit of money in the region.

I will continue to support the growth of tourism in Katherine. I will continue to support the growth of agriculture in Katherine - and relevant industries. I will continue to support, if possible, the processing of livestock in Katherine. Even before I became the Minister for Regional Development, I was the one who put to the Australian/New Zealand food authority a proposal to change the definition of camel to game meat so it could be slaughtered on the field, and processed in abattoirs in places like Tennant Creek or Katherine, thus obviating the need for sophisticated abattoirs. It takes time. I still hope it will happen. That will probably be a very strong industry which could grow in Katherine or Tennant Creek.

As for Tennant Creek, I am advised it is currently booming because of the mining industry. I have received information, drill results for gold and other metals in the region. I have to tell you, I am very excited with the potential for Tennant Creek to, once again, become one of the biggest and most vibrant mining towns in the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: There is no doubt about that, because they rely on mining to keep them surviving. It is wonderful there are things happening around Tennant Creek. But that major thing is not going to happen around Katherine; it needs something else, as well.

Mr VATSKALIS: My advice, member for Katherine, again, is that the federal budget contains significant funds for upgrade, renovation and construction of Defence housing. Tindal Base is earmarked for one of those areas for upgrade.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it is.

Mr VATSKALIS: So, it is not only the prison, I consider Defence contributes significantly to the economy of Tindal. You may remember I was the minister who put to Brendan Nelson when he was the Minister for Defence that Tindal should not be reduced in number, or have people removed or made a multiple base. He assured me at the time that it was not going to happen. I see that was a big win for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it certainly was. We have to remember that that addresses one area - trade. Those people who are tradespeople in Katherine who have had contracts with Tindal will continue to have those contracts with Tindal over the next period of time. Quite frankly, they are very good and there is not many of them. So, now we have a problem with shortages of tradespeople in Katherine as well. Obviously, other towns have a shortage as well.

Getting back to that major infrastructure development, that is so important for both Tennant Creek and Katherine. At this time, I would be hanging my hat on Katherine. We do not have all of those new mines happening around us. Yes, we have Maude Creek opening up next year that will provide some jobs to some local people. They have made a commitment to give apprenticeships and training, which is absolutely fantastic. We have that.

Getting back to the Growing Katherine Business Group which has been formed recently to assist in implementing the Sirolli community-based facilitation program. On the surface, it has the potential to make some big changes to Katherine. I have to confess, minister, I had never heard of it until you launched it in Katherine. I am about five pages away from the end of the book now. It is a total flip around - it is a total reversal of how we have addressed regional development in the past, I believe. It is going to take me a while to get my head around it. I have no doubt it will take a while for others to do the same.

When will a facilitator be employed to assist that group? How will the facilitator be identified and employed? Who will pay for the facilitator and for how long will their contract be?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, I have to admit, I had never heard of Sirolli before. We were trying to find a way to foster regional economic development, because I had the same worries as you. It is not only Katherine, it is places like Timber Creek, or other places that have less opportunities than Katherine.

However, I have to admit it was Mr Malone who introduced me to Sirolli. When he explained the program and the Esperance experiment to me, I got really excited. Mr Malone went down to Esperance and he met with the local people. He came back and spoke highly of Mr Sirolli. I rang Mr Sirolli. He came to my office. Before he came, I got a copy of the book from Mr Malone and, I have to tell you, within half-an-hour, I had read about one-third of the book. Some of the case studies which highlight the program's power, especially the ones in the American Midwest, just blew me away. I could not believe a man who, with simple logic and common sense, could change the fortunes of places in middle America or even in Esperance. After Mr Sirolli came to my office - he stayed for about two hours - I immediately said to Mr Malone and Mr Gatton that this is an program we have to conduct. If we do not try it, we will never know if it works. The government has allocated \$340 000 over four years, which is to employ the facilitator, provide money for the training of the directors, and provide other money for the equipment.

Mrs MILLER: So the directors that will be appointed will be trained?

Mr VATSKALIS: They will go to courses. We have advertised for the recruitment of the facilitator. The position of facilitator will be there for four years.

Mrs MILLER: Right, and, obviously, you have just said ...

Mr VATSKALIS: And the Katherine Council is contributing some money towards the position.

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: There will be sufficient money for the person to be there for four years.

Mrs MILLER: Hopefully, if it is working well and it needs support for a bit longer, you would not just cut it off there, would you?

Mr VATSKALIS: You do not kill the goose that lays golden eggs.

Mrs MILLER: Oh I know that, but I am asking you to make sure you do not.

Mr VATSKALIS: No. As a matter of fact, we intend to expand the Sirolli project to Jabiru, Tennant Creek and, possibly, Alice Springs. However, we are looking to the local people to deliver. It is not up to us; it is up to the people of Katherine. If we find Katherine does well, we can then have a bright example to point to the others and ask why they should not utilise the Sirolli experience. I have strong faith the people of Katherine will grasp the opportunity.

Mrs MILLER: So do I. I sincerely hope it does well.

Mr VATSKALIS: The fact that both of us, on either side of politics, support it, is a very good indication that things will happen in Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I am very pleased to think, in a very short time, there should be positive results, looking at the way he has been able to set businesses up and the way the process works and that you will introduce it to other regional towns throughout the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is our intention.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. I was pleased to be at the opening of the Desert Knowledge Precinct two years ago. How many people are employed at the Desert Knowledge Precinct now?

Mr VATSKALIS: Would you like to wait for Desert Knowledge output?

Mrs MILLER: Is it totally separate? Hang on, I have not even come across it yet. I can not see it under anything.

Mr MALONE: Desert Knowledge is the appropriation which passes through DBERD. However, it is actually an independent statutory corporation, so, the Chief Executive is Mr Huigen. It is probably easier to ask a series of DKA questions all together, rather than disperse them through discussion about regional development.

Mrs MILLER: So, where do you have it? Under Business and Industry Development, have you?

Mr VATSKALIS: Which one?

Mrs MILLER: The output. Where do you have it?

Mr MALONE: It is a separate output. It would make it easier if we covered all the DKA questions together. If that is what you want to do at this stage, there are no problems with that.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, we will do it in non-specific then.

Mr VATSKALIS: Do you have other questions for DKA?

Mrs MILLER: No, I just wanted to ..

Mr VATSKALIS: Just the one. We better answer it then. John.

Mr HUIGEN: John Huigen, Chief Executive Desert Knowledge Australia. At the moment, the Business Innovation Centre employs 21 staff of which 14 are employed by the Desert Knowledge Research Centre, six by Desert Knowledge Australia, and one person from the Desert Peoples Centre. They have their temporary headquarters in the Business Innovation Centre while they are waiting for their Desert People Centre to be completed.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how far away is the Desert Peoples Centre from completion?

Mr VATSKALIS: John, you can answer that one if you want to.

Mr HUIGEN: Certainly. The first five buildings are nearing completion and they are scheduled to be handed over in July or August this year. The next package is presently under construction, and that will complete the first stage which has been approved by Cabinet for the Desert Peoples Centre. That will probably be about mid-year next year. We are struggling with a lack of contractors, like lots of other places in regional Australia.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. That is all I have, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I raised this issue with the previous minister and I do not know whether your department may give it some time of day. That was in relation to whether we should have smaller prisons throughout the Territory. In a lot of parts of Australia, regional development includes the possibility of having regional prisoners. Has your department looked at what effects the siting of a prison farm in a region would have in that community? It is not just me. The member for Barkly was pushing for a prison farm at Tennant Creek.

Mrs MILLER: And Katherine.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, prisons come under the minister for Justice, you know very well ...

Ms CARNEY: He tried that.

Mr VATSKALIS: There might be benefits, but also there might be disadvantages. The Department of Justice carried out a comprehensive study for establishing a prison and/or prisons. They found there are some difficulties establishing prisons in regional centres. They made a decision to establish the prison near Darwin for reasons which I am not - it does not come under my portfolio so I cannot give you a clear picture. You probably should have asked that question of the member for Johnston, the minister for Justice.

Mr WOOD: I have, minister, but I look at your portfolio and the overall goals of regional development, and they are to encourage and assist in the strengthening of the existing regional economies and, possibly, the development of the economies in remote communities. I would have thought, with the Territory having some of the highest unemployment figures in Australia in the remote areas, we would be doing our darndest to overcome some of the hurdles the government describes by putting those prisons in those communities, and seeing whether we can help some of those communities grow.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, I agree with you. That is why the department is undertaking a study of regional places like Ngukurr, for example, to find out what is in Ngukurr, and what we can put in Ngukurr. How can we get further economic development in Ngukurr? For example, in Ngukurr there are 2000 to 3000 people who have cars. Is there a car repair facility? Is there a car painting facility? Can we force that business there that can cater for the cars? Are there other opportunities?

As the Minister for Housing, I have announced nearly \$1bn worth of construction of houses. Can we utilise that project to have economic development through employment and training of local indigenous people? So, we are really focusing on something the private sector can do, or government can foster it and private sector can continue.

Mr WOOD: The governments run prisons. You do get private prisons, but governments run prisons. We know that in the - I am trying to think of the report - one of the reports that came out many years ago said people should be imprisoned close to their communities. The advantage of that is that you would be, as a government, fulfilling that obligation that I think people signed off - I think it was the Deaths in Custody. One of the recommendations was not to house people a long way from their communities. Not only would you be fulfilling that requirement, we all know that prisons have the opportunity for employment, provision of services to that prison, so they would create some economic growth in those areas. To summarise, minister, has your department had a look at whether prison farms would be beneficial to communities, and did you report back to the government on that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I said before, the Department of Justice looked into the prison situation. It is their baby, their responsibility, they look into it. I am looking at things that will support the mining industry, the arts and crafts, the agricultural and tourism industries of the region - developing new mining, tourism, agriculture, and horticulture enterprises; how to utilise the local knowledge and skills. This is what we are focusing on. The department of Mines is a different portfolio. It does not come under my portfolio, so I cannot give you an answer for that.

Mr WOOD: Right. I would expect the Department of Business, Economic and Resource Development to look at all opportunities – private and government - to open up avenues for employment and development.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, all departments look at regional economic development, but my department looks at economic regional development, especially focused on micro-enterprise and enterprises.

Mr WOOD: Minister, may I ask another question through the Chair? With this new local government reform, you have roughly three regions that the government, for better or worse, is requiring the new councils to be involved in as three regions of the Territory. Has your department played any role, or will it play any role, in the development of those regions in conjunction with local government?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Malone.

Mr MALONE: During the development of the shires, officers from our department have been involved with the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport in looking at economic matters in each of those shires. The responsibility, though, for the formation of the shires, clearly, and also the transition for businesses, in particular with councils, is with Local Government, Housing and Sport and not us.

We have Economic Development Committees currently across the Territory. We have the intention, sometime in the immediate future, to sit down with the shires and look at how our Economic Development Committees can plug into the structures the shires put in place. We do not think it is right to do it right now; our committees are working fine. However, in the longer term, we are looking for synergies between the work we have been doing and what the shire councils are looking to do in the future, as well.

Mr WOOD: Roughly, what are your regions? How do you divide up the Territory?

Mr MALONE: We do not have a specific way of dividing up the regions. Our Economic Development Committees represent communities of interest - natural connections between people in that particular region. So, in some areas, for example like the Gulf region, it covers a vast area. In other areas such as Victoria River, it is actually small and centred on Timber Creek. That is part of the transition that we will need to talk to the shires about in the future: how our work and their work can come together.

Mr WOOD: Do you not see that, perhaps, there might be some confusion amongst people out there who, on one hand, have been told they have to part of regional developments – it is a requirement now under the act which I do not think is the way to go. But, anyway, you are also running regional development. Do you think the sooner the two merge in some way, the better it would be for people out there?

Mr MALONE: Again, the shires are responsible for regional development, which includes all dimensions of development. Our responsibility is very much focused on regional economic development. We think, for the time being, the activities we do with our Economic Development Committees, along with the work we do ourselves and with our partners through the Commonwealth, are meeting the obligations we have right now. However, at some stage in the future, as the shire councils move more strongly into this space, we anticipate working more closely with them. We do not have a timetable for that at this stage.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There are no further questions on Output 1.1? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Chairman, can I table that map, as I promised the member for Katherine, please?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, sure.

Output 1.2 – Business and Industry Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions relating to Output 1.2, Business and Industry Development. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thanks, Mr Chairman. Hello minister; hello everybody. There is a bit to get through in relation to all of your output areas, minister, so I will see if I can go as quickly as possible. I ask at the

outset that, if you have material you have in a form that is able to be tabled, can you table it in the interest of time?

Last year, minister, the three output areas in this portfolio included Business Development. That has been changed this year to Business and Industry Development. Do I take it that the functions are broader than they were last year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Why then, minister, is it the case that there has been a reduction in the budgetary allocation for that this year? I will lead you through it. In this year's budget, Business and Industry Development got \$14.423m; in last year's budget, Business Development received \$14.489m. Not much in it, but a reduction nevertheless. Why, if the functions are broader?

Mr VATSKALIS: The estimate for 2007-08 was \$14.273m, and the budget for 2008 is \$14.423m.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, you are looking at last year's budget paper, or this year's?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the estimate for 2007-08 was \$14.273m. The budget for 2008-09 is \$14.423m, which is an increase of \$150 000.

Ms CARNEY: In last year's budget, Budget Paper No 3, page 161, Business Development, Budget 2007-08 - \$14.489m. Correct? Next to Business Development.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: This year, on page 183, Budget Paper No 3, Business and Industry Development budget 2008-09, \$14.423m. Correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can provide you with the information later. We cannot provide it for you now.

Ms CARNEY: When you say the information, are you referring to the answer to my question?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, why there was a reduction? Thank you. Last year's Budget Paper No 3, page 163, it was estimated that 200 businesses would receive financial assistance. This year's Budget Paper No 3, the revised estimate for 2007-08 is 150. Why did you not achieve the target, and how many businesses have received assistance to date?

Mr MALONE: There was a change in the reporting. Some of the grants that used to appear under Business Development now appear under Regional Indigenous Economic Development.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. How many businesses have received assistance to date in 2007-08?

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not have the numbers now. We can provide the information later, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Just to be clear, should I ask this and the last question on notice? Or, when you say later, do you mean at the end of the session, or should we let ...

Mr MALONE: We will have the information for you shortly.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you.

Mr MALONE: We have a table, we are not finding it right now.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. The follow-up question was in relation to how many businesses have received assistance in 2007-08. How does it compare with the preceding year? Will you have that information, as well?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Can you table a list of those businesses that received assistance, the nature of assistance, including money paid, for 2007-08 to date?

Mr MALONE: We normally provide that information in our annual report.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry. Is it in the annual report? It will not be up-to-date, of course, because the last annual report was 2006-07. So, can you, at these estimates hearing, provide it to date?

Mr MALONE: Are you asking for 2007-08 or 2006-07?

Ms CARNEY: 2007-08 to date.

Mr MALONE: We will not provide the information tonight, because that information needs to be reconciled through the year. There is information in terms of the grant provided and the drawdowns associated with those grants. A lot of the grants we provide are for business development and are on a staged basis. They need to be reconciled at the end of the financial year. All that information for all grants will be published in the annual report.

Ms CARNEY: When you refer to all grants, is that a way of saying the money provided from the department to these 150 businesses or whatever?

Mr MALONE: Yes, it is.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, you said earlier there had been a change, so, when I ask if 150 businesses were predicted to have received assistance from government in the 2007-08 budget, it was revised down, I think. Does that mean fewer businesses in 2007-08 received assistance from government; namely, fewer than in 2006-07, for instance?

Mr MALONE: It is a difficult question to answer at this point. We need to go through a reconciliation process of drawdowns, because there are many businesses we have approved the assistance to that may not have yet have drawn down any funds from the departments. The programs run continuously, not so much close off from year to year.

Ms CARNEY: But through you, minister, whether they have cashed the cheque is one thing, but the department, surely, can provide details for the 2007-08 year of how much financial assistance was provided to businesses to date. We are not talking cheque butts in the bottom drawer, are we?

Mr VATSKALIS: David.

Mr MALONE: Mr Chairman, I have a table. I just cannot find the table in my folder right now. It provides a complete list of all grants provided for the year in total number of grants and expenditure against those grants.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so did I misunderstand you when you said that you could not provide that information for the annual report; but you can actually provide that information to this Estimates Committee tonight?

Mr MALONE: I can provide the information in totality. I cannot provide the breakdown in terms of your original question, which asked for those business names and also the purpose for those grants.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry to labour the point, but I do not understand - and please tell me, and perhaps tell me a different way - why it is that the department can provide me with the global figure, but cannot provide me with the list of businesses that received support. Surely, it is on a spreadsheet in someone's office, minister?

Mr MALONE: The issue is not whether it is available for release; it is about reconciliation for those expenditures and for the purposes of those particular grants. There is a whole series of grants that are provided, for example, for indigenous businesses. They may seek a whole series of different financial assistance within a total global package - including things like capital items, which we may purchase directly for them, as opposed to providing the grant directly to the recipient. That reconciliation process needs to occur. We have the information of the funds approved, but we do not necessarily have the reconciliation of expenditure.

Ms CARNEY: I was not actually after, with respect, reconciliation. Perhaps, I did not ask the question clearly enough. Minister, can you provide me with the funds approved to businesses in 2007-08 to date? Can you table or provide details of the list of businesses that received assistance, the nature of the assistance, including money approved for 2007 to date?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will take this question on notice.

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Question on Notice No 6.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Araluen, can you restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*.

Ms CARNEY: I will give it my best shot. Minister, can you provide details of the funds approved for businesses in 2007-08 to date, including amounts allocated, the nature of the assistance, including the money provided for 2007-08 to date.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are prepared to take that on notice, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 6.1 for the purposes of *Hansard*.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, minister. Next one, you might think I am getting to Defence Support. I guess in a sense I am, but it fits equally in this input. I have only one question so bear with me. The performance measures have changed from this budget. Last year, in the performance measures, there were: 'Defence related business development and awareness activities'. Those activities were listed. In this year's Budget Paper 3, page 185, there is no reference to Defence Support. In the agency profile on page 181, there is mention of Defence Support; in fact, the Defence Support Industry Development strategy which we have debated in parliament.

My question is this: why are defence-related business development and awareness activities not included in the performance indicators for this output this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: David Malone can answer that.

Mr MALONE: The performance measures just list a series of activities across the department. The department still continues to operate a Defence Support Unit to engage strongly with the Defence industry and also with AIDN-NT, the industry association. It just has not been listed in the budget papers as an activity.

Ms CARNEY: Can I ask why?

Mr MALONE: I am unsure.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, do you know?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am not sure at this stage.

Ms CARNEY: You will appreciate why I am asking the question. I will not have much of a go, but we have talked in parliament of the importance of Defence and Defence support, activities and so on. First, I would have thought it important enough to list again in this year's budget paper, as you did last year. Second, how does anyone know - including me - what activities are undertaken in relation to Defence Support? I am not suggesting that thousands of Territorians rush off to get the budget papers, but, for anyone who is interested, at least they can pick up the budget papers and see what the department is doing. They cannot do that. Does that concern you?

Mr VATSKALIS: The fact that it is not stated in the budget papers does not mean that department does not continue with the activity.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I accept that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Certain things have happened during the year which the department has actively pursued and personally attended, either locally for interstate. Some of these events happen every year or every second year, and we have been there and we always make sure people, especially the Defence Support industry in the Territory, are well aware of that either because we have provided information or it is because on most occasions they come with us. The department has, and will continue to support Defence Support industry here in the Territory by providing funding for travel with us and providing space for exhibitions in some of the warfare exhibitions that happens in different areas, and continued development of the Defence Support Hub. We have already allocated \$2m for 2008-09 for the Defence Support Hub to construct an intersection and essential services up to \$1m. So, the Defence Support is clearly in our focus. It does not matter because it is not stated here. Things like that happen.

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but you were the one ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I can understand it is not entirely appropriate ...

Ms CARNEY: You changed it to business and industry and development ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I will make sure that next time it appears. It does not mean it does not happen; people know that.

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but it was strange it did not appear, which is why I asked the question, thank you. Last year's Budget Paper No 3, page 163, published the number of, quote: 'clients assisted through ...'

Answer to Question on Notice No 6.1

Mr VATSKALIS: Excuse me, member for Araluen, I found the table with the grants we provide to industry. If you want me to table it now, I am happy to table it now, rather than having to give notice. It is up to you.

Ms CARNEY: Oh now, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that the 6.1 document?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that is ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to provide this information.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that one.

Ms CARNEY: Last year's Budget Paper No 3, page 163, you published a number of clients assisted through business improvement programs. The estimate for 2007-08 was 12 860. How many were actually this year to date? Obviously, I want to know whether you have met your target.

Mr PHILLIPS: Doug Phillips, Director, Development Liaison. The 12 000 was the number of visits our client managers will undertake. We achieved 11 086.

Ms CARNEY: Not bad. That is as of today?

Mr PHILLIPS: As of the 31 May.

Ms CARNEY: Ah, you have met your target pretty much - well done! Thank you. This year's Budget Paper No 3, page 184, first bullet point under the heading Business and Industry Development, refers to quote:

assisting in the development of a better informed and capable Territory business community through providing business information, access to training, coaching and business planning programs;

Can you outline - and, if you have it in table form, can you table it - the nature of those programs; what were they; exactly how many there were; and where were they held?

Mr MALONE: I do not have it table form, but to provide an example of where we are, we are just on target for the reaching 105 000 contacts with Territory businesses, which includes all the activities through our Territory Business Centres. There has also been the Territory Upskills Program, and we will dig out the number of attendees for that in one moment. In addition to that, there is the provision of the Business Growth Program. Doug, perhaps, you could provide the numbers for that?

Mr PHILLIPS: Yes. In 2006-07, the total business growth we undertook was 61; and in 2007-08 - these are all figures to the 31 May – it was 101. In the case of 2006-07, 11 of the 61 were regional businesses. In 2007-08, out of 101 there were 47 regional businesses - a 400% increase in the regions.

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Mr PHILLIPS: And a 65% increase overall.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. That is great. Is that the same as - and I may have missed it - the coaching and business planning programs? Is that what we are talking about?

Mr PHILLIPS: Yes, that is correct.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Just bear with me, if you could. In 2007-08 to date, how many employers were provided with advice and information about the Business and Skilled Migration Program? Of course, that is referred to in the third bullet point on page 184. You can anticipate the follow-up question: how does that compare with the previous year?

Mr VATSKALIS: We received 823 in 2007-08 until the end of May, and last year, 2006-07, 704.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could you give me the figures and the dates again?

Mr VATSKALIS: 2006-07, 704.

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: 2007-08, until the end of May, 823.

Ms CARNEY: Right. So, an increase, which is always good.

Mr VATSKALIS: Number of visas, yes.

Ms CARNEY: There is an estimate on page 185 of the number of business and skilled migration visas for nominations and sponsorships certified. In 2007-08, it was 650. It was revised upward for 2007-08 in this year's budget papers to 650. How many were there actually?

Mr VATSKALIS: The figures I gave you before was the number of visas and nominations.

Ms CARNEY: Those that were certified?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. When the Business and Skilled Migration Strategy was released in 2004, I think you were minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Ms CARNEY: No. Okay, you are off the hook. It aims to achieve 1% of the national skilled migration intake for the Territory. Have those targets been met in 2007-08?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have been advised that we have. I believe there are about 130 000 approximate numbers, now I have at the top of my head 130 000 457 visas in Australia, and I believe in the Territory we have around 1000, so it is very close to 1%.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. This is good. Minister, how many businesses are there registered in the Northern Territory in 2007-08, and to follow-up, how does it compare with the preceding year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, can I just make a comment on your previous question. The Business and Skilled Migration Strategy 2005 to 2010 that was launched in February 2005 actually indicated that we would like to have 0.6% of Australia's total coming to the Territory, so I believe we exceeded that number. My apologies, the target was 1%, the target, we had 0.6% and a few years to go.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many businesses are there registered in the Northern Territory 2007-08 to date, and how many were there in 2006-07?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Northern Territory has 13 734 actively trading businesses operating as of June 2007, and this is an increase of 318 businesses actively trading compared to the 2006 estimate.

Ms CARNEY: Great, thank you. How many businesses - and you may not have this information - operate in the Territory that are registered elsewhere?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we do not have this information.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. There is a cost for registration in the Territory, of course. It could earn some money, minister, if you wanted to make them register in the Territory as well, maybe. No requirement for them to be registered in the Territory at all?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Phillips?

Mr PHILLIPS: If a business operates under a business name in the Northern Territory, it is required by our law to be registered in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, how many businesses closed their doors in 2007-08 to date, and how do those figures compare to 2006-07?

Mr VATSKALIS: I did not hear you, sorry.

Ms CARNEY: How many businesses closed their doors in 2007-08, and how does that compare with 2006-07? And, of course, by close the doors ...

Mr MALONE: In terms of closing their doors because they had chosen to trade, I cannot provide that information, but in terms of business related and personal bankruptcies, it fell from five to two over the last period.

Ms CARNEY: Five to two businesses shut the doors in the Northern Territory ...

Mr MALONE: That is because of bankruptcies.

Ms CARNEY: That is remarkably low. Okay, good answer. Minister, last year, we asked the question: what have been the three biggest initiatives of the department and government for business? I know you are expecting this question, I think it is asked every year. Would you like to answer it?

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like to mention the reduction in payroll tax and the increase in thresholds. When we came to power it was 6.2%, now it is 5.9%, and the tax threshold was \$600 000, now it is \$1.25m. I believe that is a very significant increase. Another one is the significant increase in available funds to the indigenous business grants, which we tripled from \$300 000 to \$900 000. Another is the Land Development Corporation that strategically releases lands and made it available in the East Arm area for businesses that want to establish themselves there. I am very pleased to say it has been a very successful initiative, especially after taking a trip down there ...

Ms CARNEY: Oh, another poster.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have to show it to you, I am very proud of it. Mr Coleman will be very disappointed if he does not see it. The millions that are in that area now are staggering. It is just a significant development in the last few years.

Ms CARNEY: Where is the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I will give you a copy to make sure that you can read it. An A3 copy.

Ms CARNEY: What about Alice Springs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Another initiative is the release of land in Larapinta in Alice Springs and Mt John Valley. The significance confidence Alice Springs has shown in our government was indicated by the recent survey – and ...

Ms CARNEY: Good.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can table that one if you require. An A3 size I can then sign.

Ms CARNEY: I can probably live with that. I may regret it later tonight, but it is unlikely. Thanks, minister. Well, you can sign it. No, no.

You mentioned payroll tax. How many businesses pay payroll tax in 2007-08 as compared to the preceding year?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am advised this is a matter for the Treasurer not for the Department of Business and Regional Development.

Ms CARNEY: You mentioned also the Indigenous Business Grant program.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: I am glad you did because I could not find it in this year's budget paper. I probably missed it and, if I have, please tell me where I can find it. The reason I was after it was because we asked a few questions on this last year. The second one is: how many applications were approved? Last year it was 22, I think. What is the story in 2007-08?

Mr MALONE: The Indigenous Business Development Program has approved 51 grants to businesses in 2007-08 to 31 May.

Ms CARNEY: Great. Thank you. You might think this question is the same but I do not think it is. How many indigenous enterprises have been assisted by the department in 2007-08 to date, and where are they in terms of regions? If you have it in table form, you can table it.

Mr MALONE: I can provide information on indigenous businesses that chose to go through the Indigenous Business Development program, which is the 51 that I have just mentioned. If they go through our mainstream programs they are not identified as indigenous businesses. So, the minimum is 51 but I cannot provide the exact number.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. In respect of the 51 that you gave me for the previous answer; that is, those who received an indigenous grant, can you tell me where they were from, a breakdown of regions?

Mr VATSKALIS: The number of existing indigenous businesses assisted under the Indigenous Business Development Funding Program: we have eight in Alice Springs, 12 in Darwin, five in Katherine, five in East Arnhem. The number of new indigenous businesses created under the funding program is four in Alice Springs, 13 in Darwin, one in Katherine, and three in East Arnhem.

Ms CARNEY: Great. That is a pretty good spread. Thank you, that concludes my questions. We had a question at the beginning. Did we answer that? That was the one we put to one side?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: We did. It has been a long day. Thank you very much, indeed. See you next time.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on Output 1.2?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have many questions?

Mr WOOD: I have a few. Do you want a break?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, this would be a good opportunity to have a break for a few minutes and we will reconvene shortly.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, everyone. We were about to continue on with Output 1.2 with the member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, this might be a strange question, but you showed us this map previously. Recently, you might be aware, a memorial was unveiled in relation to the leprosarium. For some reason I do not accept, the memorial originally was going to go here on the main road at the entrance to the leprosarium. It is now around in Campion Place, which has very little to do with the actual site. This is the first time I have seen this map. I did discuss this issue with someone at the unveiling of the memorial. What I would like to know, minister, before Lot 1 is sold, would the government consider not selling part of that lot that retains the original entrance to East Arm Leprosarium? There is no other area set aside that is part of the leprosarium. The rest has been bulldozed. It is a small bitumen road with Gmelina trees.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Coleman?

Mr COLEMAN: This is really a Land Corporation question but I will answer it here. I understand there were discussions undertaken when they decided to relocate the memorial to a site in an area that was zoned open space and will remain open space, and it has a pathway that leads to a lookout. It was decided that would be a good meeting point and vantage point for the memorial to be. It would be problematic to reserve part of Lot 1 because of the profile of it. Like most of that land through that area, there will be a substantial cut, so there will not be any of the leprosarium area left.

Mr WOOD: There will be if the minister says it can be retained. We have all that land. You could retain 50 m of the front driveway, with some of the original trees there. Four years ago I visited the site, and raised the issue. It was only until last week or so when the memorial was unveiled that I knew the memorial was going to go here. The only reason I was told it was not going there was because of traffic; they thought the tourists would get run over by trucks. Well, I do not quite accept that. You actually have a World War II site on the road on the opposite side.

I would have thought, for a little piece of land left in relation to a billion dollar development would not be something that would be too difficult for government to retain. It is the only physical part of the leprosarium left. The sites on the hill, which you cannot climb up because it is all falling down at the moment, will show you nothing but industrial sheds, because the whole deal has been, basically, bulldozed. This is the only bit left. I am not expecting you to say yes tonight, minister. I at least request that that could be left. It does not have to have a sign much more than saying, 'original entrance to Leprosarium'. You are not attracting tourists that way, but you are retaining some of our heritage. We have done it for the World War II site on the road just further down the track.

Mr VATSKALIS: I will take good care of it.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, they told me you would, minister. Thank you for that.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are welcome.

Mr WOOD: Getting on to some other business development – fuel. We are a Territory that relies heavily on diesel. Our transport, our industry is all relying on diesel. What has your department done to look at trying to off-set those costs to industries, either in ways of reducing the price of fuel or, which is more practical, looking at alternative supplies of energy like LNG, LPG, condensed CNG? What is your department doing to encourage changes to the type of energy used in the Territory?

Mr MALONE: What we will be doing in the near future is rolling out programs to assist business in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and helping them with business efficiency programs. We have not directly targeted diesel, but we do recognise it is a matter that Territory business, small and large, needs to deal with. We are looking at rolling out a series of programs to specifically target that.

Mr WOOD: That will save the world from overheating, minister. However, in relation to saving industry from having to pass on enormous costs - for instance, in the live cattle trade and mining industries which

are requiring diesel, transport of goods, especially to remote communities by barge. They all must be starting to suffer the effects of very high diesel prices. There is a lot of talk about reducing excise but we have gas in the Territory. Has the government giving any consideration to the possibility of being able to switch over to gas in a large way, similar to what Wesfarmers have done right now. They have just developed a distribution point in Perth for LNG, for trucks and remote power stations. Has the government given this any thought? Should it not be starting to think laterally, not worried about the price of diesel, but looking for an alternative?

Mr VATSKALIS: This does not come under my portfolio but, let me, for a moment, cover it under my Power and Water portfolio. Because we understand the continuously rising price of diesel and how much it costs to run some of the regional power stations, one of the things we are doing - when Blacktip comes to Darwin to power our power station - is that we want to expand the network to all neighbouring communities in close proximity that currently run diesel generators to convert to gas where it is possible.

Mr WOOD: That is natural gas, is it not?

Mr VATSKALIS: Natural gas.

Mr WOOD: Not LNG?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, natural gas. With liquefied natural gas, similarly, we do not look after it, it is not in our portfolio. Other departments might look after that; for example, the Department of Transport may look at different options - for example, to power their vehicles with compressed natural gas, CNG. The government is looking at different options of reducing their costs to their communities and, at the same time, do their bit for the Greenhouse Effect.

Mr WOOD: I understand what you are saying but, if I go to the overall goals of this section, Business and Industry Development, you do look at fuels. You do look at it under in your annual report. It says you are identifying and facilitating new industries for the Northern Territory, such as bioprospecting, biotechnology and biofuel production. In other words, you encourage people to develop and use a different form of energy in the Territory. So, surely, this should be part of you do, as well?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, what you are referring to is actually investment facilitation rather than the actual production. As a previous minister for Primary Industry, we are working very close to the industry to identify land and crops that can be used in the Territory for the production of biofuels. There was a trial going ahead, the results of which I do not know because I am not the minister anymore. What we trying to do is facilitate is through investment opportunities and investing in business development.

Mr WOOD: Leading on from that question, it is one of your overall goals to look at biofuel production - it is written in here. I am interested to know whether the government - in the light of increasing costs of food, especially things like chicken, pork, which rely on feed lots - believes good agricultural land in the Northern Territory should be used to produce fuel, rather than food?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a question you should ask the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries rather than me. I want to see areas used for food remain as areas used for food. I know our government will not prepared to take away productive land to use for the production of biofuels. My understanding is you have to ask the minister for Primary Industry about that question, not me.

Mr WOOD: All right. Would that be the same if I asked you a question about what you mean by agricultural biotechnology?

Mr VATSKALIS: Primary Industry Minister.

Mr WOOD: Sounds like GM to me. That would be a good question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Not necessarily. I am talking out of my portfolio. Cloning is another option, which is not GM. I have been visited by people from China. They want to actually apply cloning technology to Australia. Cloning it is not GM technology. It is replicating plants.

Mr WOOD: We will not get into that issue, it starts to get very messy. The other issue is, if we INPEX coming to the Darwin region and they are looking for 4000 or 5000 workers, what role does your department have in trying to find those skilled workers either interstate, locally or from overseas?

Mr VATSKALIS: If any company comes to the Territory - local, interstate or international - there is a mandate to employ Territorians first, Australians second and, only then and if they cannot find local people, to employ people from overseas under 457 visas. What we have to remember also, is that it is not our government that approves the 457 visas; it is the federal government. We only facilitate the companies to fill applications, organise their paperwork, and write on their behalf in support of their applications.

Let me remind you, when the ConocoPhillips LNG plant was under construction, and I was advised by the company that they were looking to find specialised welders, they interviewed 200 people and found only one. That was a young woman who worked at Karratha. They had to import specialised welders from the US because that is the place where you find them. I know that we are not going to find all the trades here in the Territory or even in Australia. People might decide, as a last resort, to bring people in from overseas.

Mr WOOD: Is your department doing some preliminary planning in case it happens? I presume you are not going to get a workforce overnight. Is there some sort of general planning in relation to this happening?

Mr VATSKALIS: My department is part of the government working group to find out the skills, the lack of skills, how we are going to attract skills. My department is very active in trying to attract skills from interstate. When we heard that the Mitsubishi plant was closing in Adelaide, a delegate from my department and the Chief Minister's went there to try to attract people. They went to Newcastle and did the same. We worked with the government. I have to say that the most successful advertisement campaign was through a fishing magazine. We actually had 70 or 80 people ringing to find out if they can come and live and work in the Territory ...

Mr MILLS: It is the lure of the Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is right. People are thinking about the weather, the benefits of living here, and people who read the fishing magazine are interested in fishing. It is an option they will have to make. But we are working with the rest of the government departments trying to attract qualified and skilled workers. We are campaigning very hard. We competing very hard with Queensland and Western Australia. These are three states that are actually leading the way in Australia with regards to economic and mining development.

Mr WOOD: In relation to that, how successful are you in bringing business and skilled migration to the Territory? Are we able to - I presume it is a Commonwealth program - ensure some of that comes to the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have no difficulty in supporting local business to get people from overseas. The other thing we are doing is sending delegations internationally in different work or trade expos to promote the Northern Territory, together with Australian states. My department representatives went to Ireland and England. I have been advised that they had about 500 submissions of CVs. They also went to Johannesburg and Cape Town; where they received another 700 expressions of interest and CVs submitted to the department. The department will bring them back, put them together, and provide them to the Chamber of Commerce and other peak bodies linked to industry.

What is very interesting to see is that the people who decide to come to the Territory, especially from South Africa and other places, bring their families with them. They are very keen to remain in Australia and the Territory; it is a choice they make. As a typical example, recently I went to Airducter and the person who came from Zambia came with his family because they said he could work here; he wanted to be in a place where he could be safe and have a future for him and his family.

Mr WOOD: With the horticultural industry, which has always had its ups and downs in relation to the workforce, how is the government handling that in relation to having enough workers for what is, generally, a seasonal industry?

Mr VATSKALIS: The problem we have with the horticultural industry is that they need unskilled workers, and the federal government has said they are not prepared to approve visas for unskilled workers.

Mr WOOD: They can rely on backpackers on a short-term basis.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. However, at the same time, the Commonwealth government extended their work visas from six months to one year. Again, especially for the horticulture industry, the minister of Primary Industry will be the most appropriate person to respond.

Mr WOOD: In one of the regional highlights – and I am probably harping back to something I was talking about before - you have developed a Tennant Creek Economic Development Plan. Is that is up and running? Does that include any mention of a regional prison farm?

Mr MALONE: The Economic Development Committee in Tennant Creek has produced, just recently, their final plan on a page, of where they want to put their efforts in the immediate future. Those plans are available from the committees. It is their plan rather than government's plan.

Mr WOOD: Oh, so that was completed in 2007 ...

Mr MALONE: The committee did some work on a plan early on but, after they had the opportunity to see the work that had been done by other committees around the Territory, they worked their plan down to a page, which is part of the entire development process we are looking for the suite of EDCs, or Economic Development Committees, to take on.

Mr WOOD: Was the mayor of the council on that committee?

Mr MALONE: The mayor was. I could not tell you whether he is on that right now.

Mr WOOD: The reason I ask is because I saw an ABC report at that time saying:

Tennant Creek Mayor, Randall Gould, said he'll keep pushing the Territory government to invest in infrastructure to build the town's economy, despite yesterday's announcement to build a new prison in Darwin, rather than a regional area.

Tennant Creek thought it was a good idea, so I do not know whether that would have been included as part of the regional plan.

All right, I have no other questions, Mr Chairman. I have some on Defence but I will ask those when we get to Defence.

Mr MILLS: Minister, last year during estimates, you said something which I would like to expand on and get some feedback on this year. It relates to Business and Economic Development. When you were explaining last year why taxpayers foot the bill for free tickets to sporting events, hosted by ministers and MLAs, you said that, if you buy tickets in your office, the tickets will go to business leaders, people you actually want to accommodate because, in the end, you probably want something from them. So, this is a strategy. I was just wondering how many tickets have been given away to business leaders in the interest of developing business and economic development.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have not provided any tickets from my department. That was probably in my previous capacity as a minister for Sports.

Mr MILLS: Yes, yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: My department has not provided any tickets this year.

Mr MILLS: I am aware of that, minister. But, as a tool for business development with the provision of tickets to sporting events and the like, I am wondering, now that you carry the capacity that you had as a sporting minister into your capacity as Business Development minister and, flowing on from what you said last year; that you can use these free tickets to give them to business leaders to accommodate them because you can get something from it. I can see that is a strategy. I am wondering if you employed the strategy since last year in Business and Economic Development.

Mr VATSKALIS: We employ attraction strategies, but at different levels. For example, for October Business Month, we will be providing free upskilling seminars to businesses, which is something we give to businesses because we want something from them. What we want from them is economic and regional development. We would be crazy not to provide these freebees to the businesses because, first of all, they benefit businesses and, second, in turn the businesses benefit the Territory economy and Territorians. We will continue to do so, because it is a very good strategy to ensure businesses continue to grow, and provide jobs and economic development for the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Do you have some involvement and some strategic input when it comes to, say, the use of corporate box and things like that, so you can attract business leaders into the right environment so they may be able to, perhaps, be accommodated with their business plans and so on?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we do not have any input into that. The Chief Minister or other departments will decide that. If somebody comes to me and says, 'I have a corporate box and would like to accommodate somebody' - why shouldn't I? It is something we can do for those people who think they can benefit the Territory. We do it all the time. For example, we have a ball and a performance, and we provide hospitality for some people, such as we do not only for business leaders, but for other people we think would benefit the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Certainly., I was very impressed with the Chief Minister's response last night with regards to free tickets to Elton John being provided to carers and the like. There were 30 of them. That was excellent. But, it is just the extension of this idea of using tickets and corporate box use and so on, to stimulate favourable relations with business leaders. Are you able to indicate how many tickets have been provided in the last four months?

Mr VATSKALIS: There were not any from my department.

Mr MILLS: No, well, what about corporate box use?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr MILLS: I am a little surprised, because the use of the term whole-of-government approach, the approach you described when you were the Sport minister, now not being carried across to Business and Economic Development. You have a great opportunity now to really push this strategy to the next level.

Mr VATSKALIS: The department does not provide tickets like that. If we become aware that some positions are available in corporate boxes, we provide names of people we think would be the most appropriate people to be invited. The department has nothing to do with providing tickets; we do not get tickets. The only thing we provide is a certain number of names that will attend events, such as the V8s. The Chief Minister might feel like it happened before, but it happened many years ago. I hear what you say, and I think they use those tickets sometimes, not only for business, but some sports tickets go to high schools and primary schools to make sure kids go. That way, they can generate an interest in kids to actually play soccer or basketball. Like I said to you before, we do not provide tickets, we only provide the names, if we are requested to provide names, so these people can be invited.

Mr MILLS: Okay, I understand that you are approached by the Chief Minister to see whether you could provide names of people to be put on lists - for example, corporate box use or V8 Supercars?

Mr MALONE: The reality is, in the work that we do, we engage with investors in the business community on a daily basis, and this discussion might lead you to believe that providing tickets to sporting events is a key component of what we do.

Mr MILLS: Oh, no, I do not think that.

Mr MALONE: In the broader context, it is a tiny part of a very wide engagement strategy with the business community. Our people work very hard to not only provide the information investors need, but also to link them to other people throughout the Territory who might support their particular projects. On occasions, we provided names to the Department of Chief Minister for major events, but that is an infrequent activity. The majority of the work that we do is about trying to do the networking behind the scenes.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that. I am not, for a moment, thinking this is the major initiative and activity in facilitating relationships and so on. I just wanted to take that to the next step when you made that statement last year, and see how it is now applied in this new context where you can really drive that strategy even further. Thank you for that information.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Economic Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now put questions relating to Output 1.3, Economic Development. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, are there any questions. You do not have to try real hard.

Mr WOOD: No, I had marked off a couple of things, but I do not think it was in that area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no questions, that concludes consideration of this Output Group 1.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Under the heading of Minister for Defence Support, one of the priorities of your department is to develop a Defence Support Hub near Robertson Barracks, which I know very well. Could you give us an update on how far that piece of land has developed; and how long will it take to get ready for someone who would like to develop there to set up at that hub?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, as you are aware, member for Nelson, the new government in Canberra has decided to do a review of the procurement process, which will take at least 18 months. Until that review is completed, some things the previous government had in mind might not happen. Now, our Defence Support Hub was developed to attract Defence-related companies to be based here in Darwin, to provide support to the Navy, Air Force and Robertson Barracks. Despite the fact that we cannot proceed without one yet, we have a strong expression of interest from people who want to position themselves to be there and have some land when the tenders are announced after consideration of the review. Also, we have allocated \$1m to start putting in place some of the services.

We are encouraged by the response of interest for the Defence Support Hub. It is located in the right position which is close to Robertson Barracks for many reasons. One of those reasons being some of the platforms used by the Army now are so sensitive, the providers - that is, the American government - are very keen to protect them. Some of the components of these platforms cannot even be opened in Australia; they have to be sent to America. Some of the components cannot be seen by people who are not born in Australia or in a country approved by the American suppliers. So, the response we get from the people who position themselves to service those platforms, is that it is the right position and there is a lot of expressions of interest.

I know you are going to say it is still, bush; I agree with you; but we are progressing. A \$1m has been allocated in this year's budget to start doing some work.

Mr WOOD: I do not have a problem with the hub.

Mr VATSKALIS: I remember you saying ...

Mr WOOD: I thought that bit might have been set aside for the Navy, because that bit has a water on it, and magnetic ant hills ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Only in the Wet.

Mr WOOD: Only in the Wet. Well, I will invite the Navy to come in there, just in the Wet.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Army has amphibious gear.

Mr WOOD: The rest of the land is fine. I was going to ask you more questions about how far it has progressed. Obviously, it is not, so I do not have any more questions on that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who appeared today, providing advice in relation to Business, Economic and Regional Development today. Thank you all for your appearance.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to consider the Land Development Corporation. Minister, I would like you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Land Development Corporation.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr John Coleman is the Executive Director of this Business, Industry and Development, called DBERD, and General Manager of the Land Development Corporation. I am extremely pleased to welcome the Land Development Corporation today under the leadership of John. The map that I tabled before shows very well the economic and industrial activity in the area under the jurisdiction of the Land Development Corporation. There is strong demand for suitable land near the water, which the government has made the conscious decision not to sell, but to lease. However, on the other side far away from the water, we are happy to facilitate and accommodate companies that want to buy land. The proximity to the water, the railway line and the main highway has made the area around the East Arm the ideal location for establishing support industries for the mining sector, the port and other retail goods and services.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Mr MILLS: Yes, there are. You made an interesting comment in the statement that I would like you to elaborate on; that being government, I think you said, wisely 'has decided rather than sell to lease the land'.

Mr VATSKALIS: Only the land near the water and the railway frontage.

Mr MILLS: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is strategic land.

Mr MILLS: Can you expand on the merits of that kind of decision, please, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: The demand for land near the water and the railway line is high. People can actually acquire land, and either land bank or lock it away from other people. As you are aware, recently I announced the common user facility which is a facility to be used by anyone in the Territory or Australia for the construction of machinery equipment modules as a short-term lease, rather than acquiring and then utilising it as a facility and charging whatever they like. This has become a major problem around Australia in other states where they sold the land near the water. We saw what happened in places where they actually leased the land near the water and provide it for the construction of modules. It was a strategic decision not to sell that land, but to lease it, because that land is so strategically positioned it should belong to all Territorians rather than individuals or corporate entities.

Mr MILLS: I agree with you completely, minister. That is a very sound approach. I ask, when you are having your next conversation with the Chief Minister, to explain that concept because that was the very same concept forwarded with regard to the waterfront development; that there was the capacity to have an underlying lease arrangement with that which occurs upon that foundational lease - to be long-term lease arrangements and so on, and development committed and conducted on that basis. That concept you have just described, I completely agree with it. That was a concept that could have been developed with regard to the waterfront. Not going back to old things, but we did have a very interesting exchange last night. The Chief Minister does not have the same grasp of those foundational issues of strategic use of land in the long-term as you do. So, well done. Could you please pass that on?

Mr VATSKALIS: There is a fundamental difference between the waterfront and the area near the East Arm. The latter is, and will continue to be, vital for the Territory to develop, not only in that particular area but throughout the Territory. The waterfront, on the other hand, the way it is developed is a totally different

concept, a totally different tenure. It is not going to provide - even if it is leased - the same benefits the common user facility, let us say, will provide the Territory. To actually mix them together and say, 'Your idea is great but it seems the waterfront is bad', is comparing apples to oranges. That is wrong. If you want to score a political point, that is fine. But, if you look at the economic reality, leasing the area here in East Arm, especially part of the East Arm area, only those regions near the railway line and the water - which are vital - it is a totally different situation.

Mr MILLS: Sure. I accept it is not apples and apples. The only point I make is that the broad concept does have application. It does not mean what has happened down there is completely wrong. It is just that you touched on a concept I think Chief Minister did not understand. There are applications, there are ways it could occur, there are models that have been used in other places. It is history now, but it is just I was really pleased to hear you refer to the strategic use of land in that way. Thank you, minister.

Just a couple of questions related to the Land Development Corporation. I have a lot of ground to cover and to try to understand the things that are under my responsibility, but the balance sheet ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, are we still on ...

Mr MILLS: No, pardon me, I am getting - it is late.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are still on the opening statement.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I have finished with the opening statement. Thank you very much.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I did not know that you were leasing land there. I also think it is a good idea. How does it work in practice where you have a business down there? For instance, Tiwi Barge's land, is that leased?

Mr COLEMAN: John Coleman, Acting Executive Director Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development and General Manager of Land Development Corporation. The old areas of Hudson Creek were developed by the owner of Tiwi Barge some 20 years ago, and it was freehold land. It was converted to freehold when he developed it. So, all of the waterfront blocks that exist along Hudson Creek, as they are now, are freehold.

Mr WOOD: So, in practice, if someone leases it and they need to set up sheds and put in access to the water, is the lease sold back to the government, or can the government take the lease back if it does not feel that the land is being used?

Mr COLEMAN: In fact, what the Land Development Corporation is undertaking now is developing more waterfront land. We will be going to the public in the next few months about releasing additional land to be developed out to water. That will be a leasing arrangement where they develop the lease and it remains a lease for a 35-plus-35-type arrangement.

Mr WOOD: When the lease is up, obviously some infrastructure on that lease could not be taken away. Who will own that then? Say, it is a facility for the barge to come in.

Mr COLEMAN: Land and infrastructure thereon is indivisible, so it would belong to government at the end of the lease. However, our lease documents have arrangements within them that allow negotiated separations. We can say: 'You can either take the improvements away at your cost', or we might, at that particular time, see some value in them remaining for the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Minister, when you said module, am I thinking, physical modules in the form of transportable buildings?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. For example, there are ones at Alcan in Gove, manufactured in Thailand or somewhere else. They loaded it on the boat and they took it to Gove. Or very similar to what they are doing down in Quindanning in Western Australia, where a lot of the oil rigs are manufactured on land, transported to the waterfront, loaded on a heavy-lift ship, and taken to Karratha or to wherever they are required.

Mr WOOD: Just another question, Mr Chairman. Minister, what are the boundaries, in the case of the East Arm Land Development Corporation?

Mr COLEMAN: From the port gates at the port, either side of Berrimah Road to the sea, right up to Berrimah Farm, either side of Berrimah Road. We have an estate through there of about 317 ha, of which 107 ha is freehold that is currently owned by the land corporation. The land corporation manages, on behalf of the Crown, the balance of that area. What is not owned by freehold either side of Berrimah Road is managed by the land corporation.

Mr WOOD: Who does Berrimah Farm come under?

Mr COLEMAN: Berrimah Farm is a separate entity, it is not land corporation, so it is DPIFM ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Primary Industry.

Mr WOOD: I realise that but, you see, it does not come under Darwin municipality or Litchfield municipality. Is there an East Arm corporation that has an overriding control over that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does this come out of the opening statement?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I just needed to know how the land corporation fits into the East Arm development, because I always presumed the whole of the land in the port area was from the Stuart Highway, Berrimah, Berrimah Farm all the way down to the East Arm port, and out to the boundaries of Palmerston and Darwin. So, that is not the case?

Mr COLEMAN: You are talking about the planning boundaries, as opposed to land corporation boundaries. They are quite different.

Mr WOOD: You own the land as the land corporation?

Mr COLEMAN: As I said, our estate is some 317 ha, 107 ha of which are freehold, and the balance we manage. It might be useful to provide the member with a map that shows the planning boundary and the tenure.

Mr WOOD: Kon will have it. You have another map, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: We can organise to provide you one. The land of the corporation is within the planning boundaries. The planning boundaries are bigger than the land corporation boundaries.

Mr WOOD: As a land corporation, you own the land?

Mr COLEMAN: And/or administer it.

Mr WOOD: Do you own other land in the Territory? You do not have to tell me specifically, because the Chairman will say it is outside the opening statement.

Mr COLEMAN: The only other area is the Defence Support Hub.

Mr WOOD: Not Glyde Point?

Mr COLEMAN: No.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – INDUSTRIAL LAND DEVELOPMENT

Output 1.1 - Industrial Land Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates proposed expenditure in the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 as they relate to the Land Development Corporation. I now call for questions relating to Output Group 1.0, Industrial Land Development, Output 1.1, Industrial Land Development. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes there are, Mr Chairman, thank you. Minister, I would like some explanation on the balance sheet, page 194. The cash and deposits, up significantly from 2007-08, to the estimate to the Budget 2008-09 - the increase in the Total Assets, then, the next significant change is Deposits Held, and

there has been a jump there and, then, in Total Liabilities, the gap between the liabilities in 2007-08 and 2008-09. I seek a better understanding from you, minister. What is this all about?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Ms Biddell.

Ms BIDDELL: Noelene Biddell, Director Finance. Basically, we have changed the accounting treatment for land sales in accordance with AASB 118 Revenue. What that means is that we do not officially recognise the revenue until the land title is transferred. So, we actually get the cash - that is why the cash has gone up \$15m, because that is what they expect to receive next year - but we also have a liability in there for the same amount because we cannot recognise the revenue until the land title is transferred.

Mr COLEMAN: If I might add ...

Mr MILLS: That explains it. Thank you.

Mr COLEMAN: I was just going to explain a bit further. We issue development leases ...

Mr MILLS: Yes.

Mr COLEMAN: ... in the business park now. Until such time as those development leases are completed and they can work to freehold, we cannot realise the revenue. That is the accounting treatment, that is why it shows that way.

Mr MILLS: Sure. Yes, okay. Good, thank you for that, it makes sense. Minister, are you currently managing any land in Darwin outside of Middle Arm that could be used to locate heavy industry?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, as Mr Coleman said, the other land outside the Land Development Corporation land is the Defence Support Hub.

Mr MILLS: There is no other land?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr MILLS: All right. Say, Dow Chemical came along, and they were looking for land, where could you direct them? Only to the Defence Support Hub? Is there no other place available?

Mr COLEMAN: Naturally, what happens within the public sector is we become aware that there are requirements, and we would, if they came to our door and said they had a requirement for land that we could not satisfy the needs of, we would suggest they talk to the Department of the Chief Minister if it was a major project, and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, if it was for an area such as Middle Arm.

Mr MILLS: Okay. So the same would apply to Arafura Resources who, I understand, are looking for land?

Mr COLEMAN: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Who are they talking to at the moment?

Mr COLEMAN: They are talking to something like a cross-government working group, and to DBERD, DPI, Power and Water Corporation - a collection across the service.

Mr MILLS: I possibly should know this, but how does the Territory Land Development Corporation come by more land? Is that possible: to come by more land, minister?

Mr COLEMAN: We negotiate the handover of land on recommendation from our advisory board. We would approach the Department of Planning and Infrastructure and say we are ready and we have the capacity to take over additional land, and we would seek their minister's approval to transfer the land to the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Would there be any preparatory discussions, considerations, for Weddell, for example, in making a bid for land that could be set aside for development?

Mr COLEMAN: Weddell is set aside for a residential township. The land corporation is bound by its legislation to deal with strategic industrial land, so we would not be going near residential land.

Mr MILLS: Even industrial land allied to an urban development?

Mr COLEMAN: If it was strategic industrial land, then we would.

Mr MILLS: So, light industry is not strategic industrial?

Mr COLEMAN: No.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Cox Peninsula?

Mr COLEMAN: That land is not owned by the Crown. I think most of that land is under land claim which is about to be resolved.

Mr MILLS: I am aware of that. But I am wondering where the mind of the corporation is with regard to the obvious pressure that will be placed under to ensure land is made available for strategic industrial development. Is there anything else on the horizon?

Mr COLEMAN: The land corporation has a five-year plan, which is being worked through at this point in time. It relates mostly to how we turn off to balance the land at East Arm. It is giving consideration to how it might address land in other areas, such as Middle Arm. The corporation, of course, would not be prepared to take on additional areas unless it had the capacity to undertake the development.

Mr MILLS: Is the five-year plan normal for strategic industrial land development?

Mr COLEMAN: It is appropriate to have a plan moving forward for the Land Development Corporation. This is the first plan we have developed, and there will be plans that go out beyond that. However, thinking in a commercial sense, we are trying to get our five-year plan sorted first then, extend beyond that, because, of course, we will not be able to do all the development within five years.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is my intention to request the Land Development Corporation develop, apart from short-term five-year plan, a mid-term plan, and, similarly, a long-term plan. When we found out there was never a business plan or a plan in the past, we started from scratch. Let us start the short-term plan first, before we go further.

Mr MILLS: Well, in my view, it is absolutely critical. You had INPEX, I understand, expressing an interest in the Northern Territory four years ago. If you only have a five-year plan, it gives you very little room to move. Obviously, you will need five-, 10-, 15- and 20-plus-year plans.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. That is the intention.

Mr MILLS: When are you moving to the next stage of developing say, 10-, 15-year plans?

Mr COLEMAN: The five-year plan is almost complete; it will be going to the board on the 30 June.

Mr MILLS: All right.

Mr COLEMAN: I expect that the board will be advising us, from that point forward, how to move with the 10- and 15-year plan.

Mr MILLS: Okay, 15-plus. Okay, thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: I want to see a 10, 25 years.

Mr MILLS: Yes, for sure. Sorry, when is the five-year plan going before the board?

Mr COLEMAN: The Advisory Board meets on Monday, 30 June and Tuesday, 1 July.

Mr MILLS: Right.

Mr COLEMAN: The agenda is just being drawn up now, so I cannot tell you whether it is on the Monday or the Tuesday at that meeting.

Mr MILLS: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions? There being no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1. That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions?. Leader of the Opposition?

Mr MILLS: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any others? I just take the time to thank the officials you had with you from the Land Development Corporations.

DEPARTMENT OF CHIEF MINISTER Output 2.1 –Asian Relations

Mr CHAIRMAN: We now move onto Asian Relations which is included in Output 2.1 of the Department of Chief Minister. Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials who are here to advise you.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I thank you for the opportunity to make some opening remarks in relation to Asian Relations. I introduce, to my right, Mr Brian O’Gallagher, Executive Director of Major Projects, Asian Relations and Trade. I highlight Asian Relations is part of a bigger group, the Major Projects, Asian Relations and Trade. We also have Mr Brendan Doran, Director of Asian Relations.

Mr Chairman, as you are aware, our government continues to develop and strengthen our links with Asia. As a matter of fact, Mr Doran has taken several trips in our region, meeting with people in Indonesia as part of BIMP-EAGA. I have personally undertaken trips to China as part of my Tourism portfolio to strengthen links. Also, we have a number of initiatives in the near future such as how to have stronger links with places like East Timor and West Timor through cultural exchanges and sports.

The Northern Territory always had good relations with the region, especially Indonesia, and you can see that very well from the strong commercial link with Indonesia, and the other commercial links we are developing with Malaysia, especially Sabah and Sarawak and, now, with China and Japan.

I am very happy to answer any questions that you have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will just call for questions generally relating to Asian Relations, as there is only the one.

Mr MILLS: Yes, we could talk about Asian Relations for some time. It is a very important area, minister. Perhaps I could start with a topical issue. The Prime Minister has described a new model for the region. What advice can you provide as to whether you have been briefed on this model the Prime Minister had described? If so, what relationship do you envisaged the Northern Territory having to this new model?

Mr VATSKALIS: With all due respect, Leader of the Opposition, the Territory is a small cog in the national region of Australia. I would not expect the Prime Minister to brief me before the leaders of the region. I am aware of what the Prime Minister is trying to do. Being a person who was born as a Greek citizen and then become a European citizen because my mother country became part of the European Union, I can see the benefits of his ideas. I say that because I have seen Europe after two World Wars decided that it was not a great idea of fighting each other; it would be better to unite because they have a better entity. I can see now, the European Union is expanding and becoming one of the super powers around the world with stronger economic links, cultural links, one passport, one currency - apart from Great Britain - and the plethora of raw material resources they can source from different areas.

What the Prime Minister is doing is for the benefit of Australia and the region. I support strongly his ideas. I have seen it work in other areas. I know there are bigger differences than they are in Europe, but the principle is there. We have organisations in place and, since I have had the privilege to know his Minister for Foreign Affairs personally, since he was a Perth lawyer and I used to be in Perth, I am pretty

sure we will have a very good cooperation with the Commonwealth. I am looking forward to have a briefing with him, because my intention is to travel to Canberra and meet not only the Foreign Affairs Minister but also the Defence Minister and the first support ministers.

Mr MILLS: Do you think there is some merit in going down the path with a single currency in the region, single passports and the like?

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember that the European Union started in the 1950s and became a reality in 1997-98. I think the next 40 to 45 years will be very interesting.

Mr MILLS: Yes, it is a very important briefing to see how they go. I have always held the view that relations are a critical element resulting in trade. However, why has there been a division between the articulation between the relation side of the enterprise and the trade now? Why has there been a division between the two operations as far as the break-up of ministerial responsibilities is concerned?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, normally, there is a separation from trade and Asia. In the past few months or years I have travelled to Asia, I never see that as separate from Asian Relations because the personal relations we develop in a country lead to trade. I have been to Indonesia as the minister for Primary Industries, but that did not stop me from talking trade with my Indonesian counterparts. I also talked about oil and gas. I the minister for Primary Industry in Indonesia. I was very surprised because, as a devout Muslim, he invited me to his own house after hours due to the good relations between Indonesia and the Northern Territory.

Even during my holidays a couple of years ago in Sarawak, I met with the Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak and the Commerce Minister. We were talking about cattle. Soon after, trade between Sarawak and the Northern Territory was reinstated after many years. The same thing happened with Sabah. It might be a division for various reasons, but neither I nor the Chief Minister see any separation. When he goes to Asia, he talks about Asia Relations and Trade; when I go to Asia I talk about Asian Relations and Trade.

Mr MILLS: I understand that being the approach, but why separate the two? I imagine the head of state – let us say the Chief Minister - would be the one to be the door opener, and the economic side of things, which is the trade, would be the business side of things. It is the person that heads the government that is the relationship builder. They are the ones who open the door. I cannot understand why it is reversed; why we have the Chief Minister carrying the trade component and the one who is carrying the responsibility of the door opener is the one who is carrying the trade and business portfolio. I just need some clarification as to why that break-up has occurred, so I can understand the approach taken with this new arrangement.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, to his credit, the Chief Minister has travelled Asia widely, from Japan to China. Probably because I am not as tall as he is, I scare our counterparts less, as was reported in *Bushranger* a few months ago. But, again, it does not really matter if I am the Trade minister or the Asian Affairs minister or the portfolio is split in two. After all, DFAT in the Commonwealth government is under two ministers and that works very well.

Mr MILLS: But why has it been done? You are explaining that there is no difference in it but, if there is no difference, why do it?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot give you the answer. You should ask the Chief Minister. I am happy to be Asian Relations minister.

Mr MILLS: It would be a great job, just like a professional networker within the region. It would be a really good job; I would love to do it. But, I still cannot understand the strategic arrangement as to why the Chief Minister does not carry the relationship component and the business minister carry the trade component. It just jars a little.

Mr VATSKALIS: It does not stop me talking about trade ...

Mr MILLS: No, of course not. You should all be doing that. But, it is the coordination of the strategy. Can you now describe to me the relationship strategy within the region? What are the three main points that describe the relationship-building strategy that is under your watch as Asian Relations Minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is participation as an observer in BIMP-EAGA - one of three members because we work very closely with them; the close link with Indonesia and other places like Timor-Leste through the provision of training or experienced services - public servants will come and be trained here, or our public servants we go and train people in Indonesia; the continued support we provide to some of the states in Malaysia with regards to animal disease, meat production, and training; and the other thing is the close links between us and Indonesia through the supply of the services to the mining sector in Indonesia.

There is also sport such as the Arafura Games, which have become more and more significant over time. Also education - a significant number of people in Asia are now coming to CDU. I was pleasantly surprised to find out there are 40 students from China currently studying at CDU, and a significant number of Indian students.

Mr MILLS: That all comes under your agency to, basically, coordinate these activities?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not necessarily because, for example, some parts come out of my agency, but some other parts will come under the Health department. For example, training of the people in East Timor for combating Dengue fever, is run by the Health department. However, my department will negotiate issues; for example, the trilateral soccer tournament which is programmed for late in September. That was instigated by my department in order to strengthen the links between East Timor, West Timor, and the Northern Territory.

Mr MILLS: So how is that going?

Mr VATSKALIS: Very well. We allocated \$150 000. We believe it will be very successful when it happens in September.

Mr MILLS: In September?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will give you tickets for the corporate box.

Mr MILLS: You are a cheeky man, minister! Yes, so stuff that is happening at CDU and perhaps Menzies and the like, you are not really involved in it but you are aware of it?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am aware of it because also there is the Asian Engagement Group with different departments participating to work together as a whole-of-government approach.

Mr MILLS: Okay. What involvement does your agency have in these things?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Mr O'Gallagher.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Mr Brian O'Gallagher, Executive Director of Major Projects, Asian Relations and Trade. We chair a whole-of-government Asian Engagement Group. That involves all the relevant agencies. It is about getting across what all agencies are planning to do in the region, looking at the synergies where we can complement each other, looking forward to see what priorities are, and sharing the information across the various agencies so we can do it in a unified approach.

Mr MILLS: Excellent. Okay, thank you. Minister, what representatives does the agency have oversight of in the region?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have an office in East Timor, Timor-Leste ...

Mr MILLS: A name please?

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Mike Gallagher.

Mr MILLS: He is your brother, yes.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Not quite.

Mr MILLS: He has been there for a while, doing a good job, too. Keep going.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is the one we have at the moment. Dr Frans Seda, who retired, was our man in Jakarta. But, at the same time, our relationship with Jakarta has matured to such an extent now that we will

not enter a political situation in Indonesia. We could not replace Frans Seda because we could not see anybody with the same expertise and knowledge about the politics ...

Mr MILLS: No, I understand.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... so we decided not to replace him.

Mr MILLS: Difficult to replace, but there no plans to have a representative in Jakarta?

Mr VATSKALIS: We found now that, with the political climate in Jakarta, it is easier for us to talk directly government-to-government; minister-to-minister. My personal experience was, without Frans Seda's help, we were able to easily access ministers in Jakarta. Things have matured a lot. I have to admit that, when the Northern Territory wanted to strain links with Jakarta, Frans Seda was instrumental - and I am speaking from personal experience because, three years ago we were in Jakarta, and Dr Seda opened every single door for us; he knew everybody. Unfortunately, he had retired, but we were able to access the government offices in Jakarta well enough.

One of the things we found out now is that there is very strong support of Australian Embassies in the regions - be it in China, Malaysia, Singapore, or Jakarta.

Mr MILLS: Sure. Are you aware, minister, that, say Queensland and Western Australia, have a number of representative officers in the region. If you do any analysis of their presence there, and compare the cost of those officers and the return back to Queensland and Western Australia, they are colossal. They are on the ground, they provide interpretation, an entry point for anyone with an interest in investments, say in Queensland or Western Australia. One is students wanting to come to live in the place. These sorts of things are really making inroads, and great gains for Western Australia and Queensland particularly. They have a number of these officers throughout the region. Why is it that there is only one person in East Timor and the representatives we once had in the region no longer exist?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, yes, I agree with you. Queensland and Western Australia may have officers ...

Mr MILLS: Just to pick two, I think nearly all of them have.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... but you have to remember that the Northern Territory was well ahead on the ground before Western Australia and Queensland had their representatives. The Northern Territory has the biggest trade with Indonesia, rather than Queensland and Western Australia.

Mr MILLS: Oh, that is mostly to do with cattle, it is not to do with an office or a Frans Seda. It is cattle.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, the fact is we started somewhere; we have achieved something, and now we have actually achieved gains without a representative on the ground. Half the states in Australia do not have representatives in these places. However, we found out we have developed our personal connections and contacts in Indonesia and other places so well we do not need a facilitator.

With East Timor now, our departments have made contacts in East Timor, and they know people so well because, bringing high-level people to be trained here, to be educated and to be trained in the Australian way of doing business, has provided us with very strong connections and contacts.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Many other things to go on to tonight, minister, so the last question will be: how do you measure your success in this area?

Mr VATSKALIS: Personal relationships are something that you cannot measure in dollar value. What we actually measure is the trade between the different countries, and the continued requests by people in these countries to come to the Territory either for training or assistance from my department. A very good example is East Timor. We have constant requests for the public servants in East Timor to come to be trained in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: They are anecdotal. Is there any way of measuring progress, achievement, against core objectives? I can understand it is difficult. Sincerely, I do. But do you have any way of measuring your progress? Do you have targets or goals of any kind to be able to keep you on track with your endeavours?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the good examples, again, is trade with Indonesia in cattle. It is nothing to be complacent about. Even when the dollar price went through the sky, the cattle trade with Indonesia

continued unabated. Everybody was afraid it would go down; instead it went up. I believe we have a trade support scheme to support our local industry to travel to Indonesia and this is producing excellent results. The other we have now is local companies that are prepared to import machinery from Indonesia, and to service the Indonesian mines. Local companies are now so well known in Asia – not just Indonesia - and South-East Asia. We will see the response we get when we go to Sabah for the international expo every two years. Our links and contacts are very strong.

Mr MILLS: I understand. Do you have any ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a very difficult thing to quantify, but events speak for themselves.

Mr MILLS: Right, so ultimately – and I think this is reasonable - trade results?

Mr VATSKALIS: The fact that we have an increase in the amount of people ...

Mr MILLS: Trade in the region.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... and cultural and sports contacts who keep coming back.

Mr MILLS: That would result in trade and, students, of course, count as trade.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. It is more than trade. Trade is a commercial transaction whereas, with students ...

Mr MILLS: Yes, I know, that is ...

Mr VATSKALIS: ... in one area it is a commercial transaction because they pay to come to university.

Mr MILLS: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: The fact they go back and they have an idea about the Territory ...

Mr MILLS: I understand the human story but full fee-paying students are also counted in that way?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Thank you, minister, I will have to, because it is the trade area, look at the trade figures to be able to measure the result. Is it the ASEAN Group, the group that coordinates all of these activities, that committee? What do you call it? The ASEAN? A committee that facilitates ...

Mr O'GALLAGHER: The Asian Engagement Group, which is chaired by the Department of the Chief Minister across government.

Mr MILLS: Right, the Asian Engagement Group. Now I am confused. I thought the relation group ran that.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: It is from within the Department Chief Minister within the Major Projects, Asian Relations and Trade Division.

Mr MILLS: Right.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: We coordinate that, and my Director of Asian Relations chairs that.

Mr MILLS: Righto, okay. Sorry, I am still a little confused as to why on earth it has been broken into two; it is still together, but it is two, and the head honcho is the trade bloke and the Business minister is the relationship minister. Interesting. All the very best. I will be watching the trade results, thank you.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No other questions? That concludes consideration of Output 2.1. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for attending this evening.

TOURISM NT

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now move on to the next portfolio for tourism. Minister, are you right to keep going or did you...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to keep going. Do you want to have a break?

Mr MILLS: No, we are fine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Let us have a small break, five minutes.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thanks, minister. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you would like, to make an opening statement on behalf of Tourism NT.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I introduce Ms Maree Tetlow, Chief Executive of Tourism NT and Ms Noelene Biddell, Chief Financial Officer. Other officials are with us and may be required to respond to some questions.

As you know, tourism is one of the most important industries in the Territory, contributing about \$750m to the Territory's gross state product, and employing 11 000 people, about 11.7% of the Territory workforce. Tourism NT has a great role to market and influence the development of the Territory as a competitive tourist destination.

The portfolio covers the key areas of marketing, destination development, and Territory Discoveries, the government business division of Tourism NT. Territory Discoveries remains the largest and only wholesaler for Northern Territory products, and its focus is exclusively in the Northern Territory. We are very proud to develop tourism for the Territory, make the Territory known all around the world, and we are not afraid to travel and showcase the Territory. It is great to see the results.

Driving to Katherine the other day, I was amazed by the number of grey nomads coming up this way. Going to Alice Springs a couple of weeks ago, I was absolutely impressed by the number of tourists rediscovering Alice Springs, which is great. I will now take questions from the committee.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions just on the opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: It is not a question. It is just a comment, minister. You talked about the grey nomads. There are fewer of them this year already in Katherine, which is quite noticeable and, I suggest, has something to do with the price of fuel.

Mr VATSKALIS: It might happen in Katherine. The information we get from other places shows the number of people who have decided now the Territory trip will be the trip of their lifetime, and they spend a lot of time here. The information we get from Alice Springs also is that Alice Springs is receiving the same number of people they received last year. In comparison, the eastern seaboard is receiving 25% to 30% fewer tourists than the same time last year. Obviously, people make the decision to travel, despite the fact that fuel is expensive.

If you stay in Melbourne, you have to spend the money to heat the house up with fuel, or you drive to Darwin, you have to pay the fuel, but at least it is warm. I am referring to Darwin generically; I am not referring only just to Darwin because, everything north of Tennant Creek is warmer all the time.

Mrs MILLER: Of course it is. Can I say one more thing? How lovely it is to be able to ask some questions of Tourism. Normally, they sit here for hour after hour, and we get to the end of the night and there are no questions asked and it is so embarrassing. So, it is really nice.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are here to give the answers.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is really nice.

Mr WOOD: The portfolios have shifted slightly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Make the most of it, member for Katherine. Member for Nelson, do you have any questions on the opening statement?

Mr WOOD: No.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – TOURISM
Output 1.1 – Marketing
Output 1.2 – Destination Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 as they relate to Tourism NT. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Tourism, Output 1.1, Marketing. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, can I request, through you, would it be possible, because there are only small output groups in Tourism, to ask questions together on Outputs 1.1 and 1.2?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will leave it open to the minister, if he wants to.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy with that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are happy with that, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy with that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are other members of the committee happy to go that way, Mr Wood?

Mr WOOD: Yes. As long as he does not take up the whole night.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, that is what I was going to say ...

Mr WOOD: But I trust him.

Mr CONLAN: No, no. I have some questions here, and some of them might relate to either.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, with everyone's agreement, we will be asking questions on both Output 1.1 and Output 1.2.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, Mr Chairman. A very good evening to everyone. How much has been spent on the Share Our Story Campaign? Can you break that down? And how many additional people have booked a holiday to the Territory as a result of Share Our Story?

Ms TETLOW: Maree Tetlow, Chief Executive Tourism NT. To answer that, the amount of money that has been spent in 2007-08 specifically on marketing - is that advertising?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, essentially as a result of Share Our Story.

Ms TETLOW: Okay. This is just the placement of advertising, so it includes various types of medium. There is \$4.22m.

Mr CONLAN: And that is over 2007-08?

Ms TETLOW: That is correct.

Mr CONLAN: And can you highlight the mediums used?

Ms TETLOW: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: You can actually read it there: on television, \$1.365m; on print, \$1.660m, which includes magazines and newspapers; on the Internet, \$620 000; and on others such as big billboards, \$575 000 - total \$4.2m.

Mr CONLAN: Would you be able to table that document for me?

Mr VATSKALIS: I can do that.

Mr CONLAN: We have seen Share Our Story now, this is the second year for Share Our Story, I believe? Third?

Ms TETLOW: I think it is we are just into our fourth, as of March.

Mr CONLAN: As of March?

Ms TETLOW: Yes, as of March.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you. How long do you envisage Sharing Our Story to continue?

Ms TETLOW: We would continue to Share Our Story whilst we are getting the responses we are currently getting from our target audience. We do a lot of tracking and research with our clients, our target audience and, whilst they are responding well to it, we will continue to use it.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, again, the second part of my first question was: how many additional people have booked a holiday in the Territory as a result of Share Our Story? Do you have those figures at all, seeing as it is such a success?

Mr VATSKALIS: Interstate holiday visitors to the Northern Territory continued to increase, with 319 000 in the year ending March 2008, which is a 17.4% increase. Nationally, interstate holiday visitors have decreased by 0.7% in comparison. So, ours is doing really well. With a gain in actual numbers, the Northern Territory increased market share of interstate holiday visitors. There was a moderate increase in the number of interstate holiday visitors nights spent in the Territory, up by 6.5%, or an extra 216 000 nights; which brings the total to 3.5 million nights.

As the number in the Northern Territory increased at a higher level that nights stayed; the hours length of stay decreased. Obviously, there is a combination of the number of people who are coming here but staying less time. That does not mean that they spent less. We have seen how people actually like to fly somewhere with budget airlines, but stay in the good hotel where, before, they would fly with a full-paying airline and stay in a cheap hotel. So, actually that is trend we have seen now; people are prepared to fly for two hours for \$50 or \$60 to \$100, but stay in a four- or five-star hotel for \$200 to \$3000 a night.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, minister. Do you have figures on who is flying, who is driving and the backpacker breakdown of the specific tourist dollar?

Ms TETLOW: Yes, we do. We do break down by some categories and we post that onto our website for the industry to review. For the categories, it is not so easy but, basically, we do 'visiting friends and relatives', 'people on holiday', and 'people of business'. Our main job is to monitor the holiday data.

Mr CONLAN: And how has that trend been over the last ...

Ms TETLOW: Sorry, if I can just continue to respond. That is the numbers the minister was reporting on; so the holiday is actually increasing.

Mr CONLAN: In 2007-08?

Ms TETLOW: Yes, that was year ending March 2008, we just got some data on it.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, destination development. Can you explain what work has been done on Destination Darwin? I believe Destination Darwin was to the tune of \$10m? Can you detail the grant recipients, if there were any, and each project that has been engaged with Destination Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: With regard to grant recipients; I will give you some information. Granted to Dundee Beach for development of fishing camp was \$60 000; Darwin Festival infrastructure upgrade was \$44 000; Cobourg Peninsula, \$34 500; Muirella Park is indigenous, \$14 000; Koongarra Walk at Aurora Kakadu Resort, nature-based development, \$80 000; Eley National Park was \$43 700, a nature-based development; Hermannsburg tourism infrastructure of \$120 000; Explorer Way, refresh signage, \$60 000; and Binns Track entry signs, \$50 000.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister. Would you be able to table that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask you, minister, what strategy you have in place to support the accommodation sector during the Wet Season?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, when I first came to the Territory in 1993, there were two distinct seasons. In the Wet, no one wanted to come to the Territory and, in the Dry, everyone wanted to be here. However, since then things have changed. To give you an example: this year, I had someone ring asking me to use my influence to book his Chinese delegation into the SKYCITY Casino. I explained that things in Australia do not happen as they do in China. There was no way I could use my influence to get them into the hotel because the hotel was fully booked, and they would not be prepared to throw someone out to put these people in the casino.

The other indicator was the white cars. I recall during the Wet you would ring for a white car and three would turn up at your door. Nowadays, you have to ring three white cars to get someone who is available because they were so many people using those cars.

The department has done an excellent job campaigning about the Territory in the Wet. We have seen a significant number of people coming to the Territory to experience the Wet, and the result is that the loading factor for accommodation in the Territory during the Wet Season is sometimes up to 70% to 80%. So, there are no real problems with filling rooms in the Wet Season. The problems we will probably have in the next few months - because of a number of developments coming online but are not finished yet - is how to accommodate people during the Dry Season. Of course, now everybody wants to come to the Territory, it will probably be hard to find the rooms. The good thing is, in the next 12 months we are going to get about 1300 rooms coming online. We might have some difficulty this year but, from the year after, we will not have any difficulties.

Mr CONLAN: So, essentially, there is no strategy because you do not, you are saying that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, actually our strategy was to bring people in, in the Wet. Of course, we filled the rooms by doing that. We actually launched a campaign 'Destination Darwin' for \$1.2m that was launched in August 2007. We had 'Tropical Summer' - that is our Wet Season - and put in \$445 000. The reason we invested this money is because we want to ensure the tourism sector remains active and does not go into hibernation during the Wet Season.

The government invested a quite significant amount of money. I have to say our partners contributed \$90 000 only, compared to the \$1.7m we contributed. So we have a strategy: go out, advertise and tell people what a wonderful season is the green season or the tropical summer or what we call the Wet Season.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, there is a report in the *NT News* on 3 June this year which talked about the possible need to billet tourists because of the lack of accommodation in peak periods. It was talking about the Dry Season. Of course, that is not just exclusive to Darwin; you see it right across the Territory in the peak season. Does this development concern you? What strategies do you have in place to limit the continuing and pronounced drops in our Wet Season numbers as a result of that?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a great problem to have - so many tourists you do not have anywhere to put them. The reality is that we have rooms coming. The Mantra Pandanus will open officially next week. We have 330 extra rooms. The Airport Inn will be completed soon and will have an extra 121 rooms. The Chinatown Medina Grand and the Vibe Hotel to be completed next year will provide another 420 rooms. In Alice Springs, the Quest Apartment, 64 rooms. I believe Gilligan's Backpackers will provide a 540-bed facility. King Canyons Wilderness Lodge will provide deluxe cabins, not to mention SKYCITY new beachside resort they are developing in the next couple of years.

It might be a bit tight this year. The reason for that is, let us not forget where we came from. In 2001, when Ansett collapsed, no one wanted to travel, nobody could come to the Territory. So, a lot of people because of the downturn in tourism did not want to invest money in tourism. Now, things have reversed. The Territory, once again, has become a preferred destination. I have to congratulate the department. You only have to open the *Weekend Australian* magazine every weekend to find out something about the Territory. This is a great campaign bringing people to the Territory.

I cannot force the private sector to provide rooms now; it takes time to bring them online. But I am very pleased that the private sector is responding positively, and we will see more rooms coming online. I forgot about the four-and-a-half star hotel the Jawoyn are planning, too.

Mr CONLAN: And Dugong Beach Resort.

Mr VATSKALIS: Dugong Beach Resort, yes. The success of Dugong Beach Resort will see other areas developing, not to mention the Bamurru Plains. The other thing we are trying to do, if Darwin is full, is move people out of Darwin. There are places out of Darwin. Go to Batchelor, and have a look at what is in Batchelor now. People would love some of the unique accommodation in Batchelor.

The other thing, of course, Katherine is only three hours by car. People can take a trip down there if things are fully booked in Darwin, stay in Katherine a couple of days, and come back later - as people do.

Mr CONLAN: You mentioned Ansett in 2001. We possibly have a crisis on our doorstep, which is the fuel crisis. I know you said in parliament you cannot do anything about fuel prices, but can you plan, or is the department planning, for a possible crisis to try to avoid this situation with fuel prices which, no doubt, is easing the grey nomads and the driving tourist?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot foresee it. I do not have a crystal ball. If anybody says they are going to produce something; they cannot do it. On the other hand, if you look at the announcement of the airlines and which flights they have cut. They have cut the ones that have been uneconomical for a long time, some in Queensland and New South Wales. The only one they cut in the Territory was the Uluru/Yulara one, because they were under-performing and, of course, the Virgin Blue flight to Melbourne.

On the other hand, probably the biggest reduction in services from Darwin to Melbourne would benefit Tiger Airline. Tiger Airline is performing very well, and they have made some statistic decisions in the past that pay off now. The same thing, despite the continuing increase in fuel, we have seen that Jetstar is still keen to come to Darwin to establish a hub. Airlines make strategic decisions that take everything into account. They support the routes that perform strongly and pull out from the places where they do not perform strongly. As a matter of fact, Cairns will be the one town in Australia that will be strongly hit from all these reductions from the airline routes.

Mr CONLAN: What about the driving tourist; the person who is one the road in their campervan? What can we do, or what is the department doing, to address this potential problem?

Mr VATSKALIS: We tell them how great the Territory is. We are going to spend about \$0.5m for the drive market, specifically for the Katherine and Tennant Creek region. We will start in March to May 2009. We are not putting all our eggs in one basket - airlines. We think that the train is another way. There are going to be some announcements about the train. Already, you have seen the platinum class that has been announced. Trains will become more and more popular. People who have never travelled in trains, will discover the train.

For the drive market, we are providing more stops on the road, beautifying some of the areas where people can rest, to such an extent that people complain that tourists now prefer to stay there because they are really well catered for with toilets and running water, rather than go to some of the roadhouses. I can understand why tourists stay in some of the roadside stops, because I have been to some of these roadhouses, and they are not very satisfying. Some of them are very good - no, the majority of them are good - but there are some where people decide to spend some really good money.

Mr CONLAN: On the fuel situation, minister, are you expecting an impact on tourism and, if so, what are you doing about it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Advertising, as I have explained to you before. We have a continuous advertisement campaign for the industry, the international airline traveller and also the self-drive traveller.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, obviously, some bad press can always do us a fair bit of harm. We have seen some of that lately. Do you have any evidence of crime having any effect, or the law and order situation in the Territory having an effect on tourism throughout the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have seen the negative campaigns, and I am very disappointed to see these kinds of campaigns when we are spending money to attract people to the Territory. People are prepared to put their town or region down for their own reasons. I congratulate Katherine, because I have never heard

Katherine having a negative campaign the way Alice Springs, unfortunately, has. We spent really good money in Alice Springs - \$2.5m. We employed a consultant to see how much negative publicity was generated in Alice Springs by certain groups, and the consultant's reply was \$7.5m negative publicity. For every dollar we spend in Alice Springs, certain groups in Alice Springs will do a negative campaign, counteracted by \$2 for every \$1 we spend. That is really disappointing.

However, we still persist because I do not think Alice Springs is a bad place. We have problems; we all have problems. To say that we do not have problems in the Territory, we are lying. However, on the other hand, the problems we have in the Territory pale into insignificance to the problems they face in Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane.

Regarding negative campaigns; people talk about them. I was very pleased to hear Crusty from Overland Steakhouse today on the radio saying, on The Ghan from Alice to Adelaide, he heard a visitor to Alice comment that they spent three hours walking around; that everything was clean and tidy. The visitor was talking up the city architecture and that it was the most beautiful place. Crusty said he has never seen Todd River so clean in 30 years of living in Alice. Against all the negativity, Alice is not all that bad. Let us talk the place up, not continue to bag it.

Mr CONLAN: Are you preaching to the converted?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, but I have to say, member for Greatorex, that I was a voice in the wilderness when I was saying how great a place Alice Springs was. At the same time, people were saying how terrible Alice Springs was - the crime capital of the world, which is absolutely untrue. I will continue to support Alice Springs, to come to it regularly, to walk the streets in Alice Springs feeling absolutely safe, which I cannot say the same for Northbridge in Perth. I lived in Perth, and I used to go to Northbridge, but I will not go now. So, I will continue to spend money in Alice Springs to promote Alice Springs as a place to go and see, because it is a great place.

The reason I said congratulations to Katherine a couple of minutes ago is because I know Katherine has problems, but Katherine Town Council and Katherine people never highlight the bad things in Katherine; instead, they highlight the good things in Katherine and what tourists can go and see.

Mr CONLAN: I am not sure why that is. What was that figure you said, \$7m for negative ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Our advice we received from the people who did the work and have given specialist kind of work, it was \$7m negative publicity was generated in Alice Springs.

Mrs MILLER: I think that answers the next question.

Mr CONLAN: \$7m negative publicity?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$7.5m actually.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No further questions?

Mrs MILLER: Oh, yes.

Mr CONLAN: Oh, yes, I have a few other questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Still going?

Mr CONLAN: Oh, yes.

Mrs MILLER: Sometimes, the negative marketing does not come from people who are really trying to promote the town, but it can happen, as it did in Katherine with the *7.30 Report* just arriving with cameras without any warning, and just ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I can accept that and that is why I say ..

Mrs MILLER: It is just frustrating.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... I am proud of Katherine, because they did not invite the *7.30 Report*, like it happened.

Mrs MILLER: No, did not.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you are putting \$1m into supporting indigenous tourism entrepreneurs. Can I ask if that means you need to be an indigenous person to qualify for the grant money, or merely someone who has an indigenous-related business? How many grant recipients have you identified as a result?

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the things we find from the research we are doing is that many people nowadays want to come to the Territory, or other places, because they want to experience indigenous culture. That does not mean only Aboriginal culture; people might go to Africa, Asia or anywhere else to experience some of the indigenous culture. We are finding that people do not want to come here in airconditioned buses and passively driven around. They want to talk to real people, sit down with real people, hear some of their stories; experience some of the things they do everyday, like basket weaving or fishing with a spear.

To apply for grant money you can be an indigenous person, or any person working with an indigenous business. It can be a business that supports an indigenous business. The reality is we have supported a number of people. It is not \$1.2m; the project funding is \$184 514. Some of the other is general expenditure or funding by federal departments.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, minister, I just asked does it mean you need to be an indigenous person to qualify for the grant money, or just someone who has an indigenous-related business?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are talking about indigenous people developing their own businesses ...

Mr CONLAN: Do you think ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that is what we are talking about. When you say an indigenous person developing business, it means an indigenous person developing a business. I am not going to develop indigenous business because, first of all, I am not indigenous and I cannot misrepresent myself as an indigenous person.

Mr CONLAN: How many grant recipients you have identified?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the number of people but, as I said before, the project funding was \$184 514 for people. We provided \$60 000 to indigenous development in Dundee. The one I am going to table about the grant we gave is called the breakdown of indigenous ...

Mr CONLAN: The previous one?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, for the movie *Australia*, you allocated \$600 000 to market that internationally?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: How much advertising do you reasonably expect to get for that \$600 000?

Mr VATSKALIS: We must remember we are not going to do the advertising for ourselves; but Tourism Australia, the federal tourism branch, will do extensive advertising around the world to attract people in Australia. We are working together with Western Australia. Western Australia is putting in about \$1m while we are putting \$600 000 to promote the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory as part of the big advertisement. The total amount Tourism Australia is putting in to make advertisements based on the movie *Australia* is \$40m. We put in \$600 000. That movie talks about Darwin and the Territory. We are so lucky we have had that chance. Having seen a preview of the movie; I believe the \$600 000 we put in was wisely spent.

Mr CONLAN: Have you seen the movie?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have seen a preview of the movie; which is absolutely stunning. It is going to be as good as *Titanic*, if not better.

Mr CONLAN: And as good as *Crocodile Dundee* when it comes to tourism?

Mr VATSKALIS: About 1000 times better.

Mr CONLAN: When it comes to bringing tourists to Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a different movie. It is more epic rather than comedy. *Crocodile Dundee* ...

Mr CONLAN: It was what *Crocodile Dundee* did.

Mr VATSKALIS: It did wonders for Australia. This moves on a different level. It shows the plains, horses, the things that everybody dreams about: billabongs, flowers, the green part of Australia, the dry part of Australia. It was a 10-minute preview which I was lucky enough to see it, with Maree. I am telling you, I was very impressed.

Mr CONLAN: The *Man from Snowy River* meets *Titanic*?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Did Darwin sink?

Mr VATSKALIS: They tried, but they failed.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I have to ask you about the Mereenie Loop. Can you please explain what is happening with it? The government has shifted from its original promise in 2001 which was the full Mereenie Loop, to now what they call the inner loop. As Tourism Minister, it must concern you that we now are only having the inner loop as opposed to the major loop.

Mr VATSKALIS: You know very well that was to support to Aboriginal tourism. However, the negotiation about the sealing of the road is part of the Transport portfolio, which is not my portfolio. So, if you want detailed information about that you should have asked the minister for Transport, or seek a briefing from her to get that information. As I said before, I supported the development of roads in Central Australia that enabled tourists to visit different places.

Mrs MILLER: Have you had a word in her shell-like ear to remind her that she is holding up tourism?

Mr CONLAN: What lobbying are you doing around the Cabinet table to ensure that this Mereenie Loop goes ahead?

Mr VATSKALIS: There are a number of factors involved in the sealing of the Mereenie Loop. It is not necessarily the government that is holding back the project. As I said to you, it is something you have to speak to the minister for Infrastructure about because she has the portfolio for roads, not me. I used to, but not any more, thank God. Everyone wants the road.

Mr CONLAN: Except the minister for Planning, by the sounds of it.

Mrs MILLER: Because it is below Berrimah.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not think that can be responded to in any way, shape or form.

Mrs MILLER: It was not meant to be.

Mr CONLAN: I ask you again, minister, I am just a bit unclear about your answer where the Minister for Tourism stands on the Mereenie Loop. When I go back to Central Australia and say that I spoke to the Minister for Tourism and asked him where he stands on the Mereenie Loop and this is what he said. Please reiterate.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Minister for Tourism supports any new development that will bring more tourists anywhere to the Territory - south or north of the so-called Berrimah Line. But, if there is something that has to do with sealing a road, or any road, or making a bridge, it is not my portfolio. Even if that sealing of a road or making a bridge will contribute to tourism, you should be asking the minister for Transport or, in the near future, seek a briefing.

Mr CONLAN: My other question then, is what lobbying are you doing to ensure that this project goes ahead?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have always advocated for tourism. I do not have to lobby my colleagues. I can talk to my colleagues and advocate tourism. If you want to find out why things happen the way they happen, I strongly suggest you seek a briefing with the minister for Transport.

Mrs MILLER: And we will wait in line for a couple of months and maybe get one.

Mr CONLAN: That completes my two Outputs 1.1 and 1.2, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, I will cross to the member for Nelson as a member of the committee.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I nearly said 'wash your mouth out' because you mentioned the word 'Outer Darwin' there for a minute. Are those concrete signs going to get pulled down eventually as one previous Minister for Tourism promised?

Mr VATSKALIS: When were they placed?

Mr WOOD: They are just opposite the ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, not where, I know where.

Mr WOOD: Oh when? About 15 years ago when we protested. I think the idea came from Doug Barden originally. He thought the region should be called 'Outer Darwin'. We thought that gave us an 'out of space' feel. It did not give us any identity.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I would be very happy to listen to ideas and suggestions. Personally, I think they are ugly; they look like pyramids half-built. I would be happy to sit down with you if you have any ideas and suggestions.

Mr WOOD: I would be happy to talk to the tourism people in the Litchfield area. I understand the reason why tourism, at that stage, did not want to use the word 'Litchfield' was because they thought it would be confused with Litchfield National Park. I believe there is an opportunity to think of something a bit brighter.

Mr VATSKALIS: Come with the ideas, and let us sit down together with the community to find out what the community wants. Personally, I think they are ugly.

Mr WOOD: So do I. The ones on Cox Peninsula Road are quite handy for target practice. I think 'Outer Darwin' has some other name written on it now.

Mr VATSKALIS: Okay, thank you. But come with ideas.

Mr WOOD: No, that is all right. The other area, is our need to promote the close-in tourism even more. I will give you an example. I was invited to one of the jumping crocodile tours, the one on the left-hand side of the bridge, in March. That is normally a time of the year when things are very quiet. I took the 9 am tour which, again, you would think would be very quiet on a Saturday morning. We had about 20 people, and they believe – and I am interested in your comments, minister - that since the introduction of cheap airfares from Melbourne - you can get up here for about \$100 sometimes - people are coming up for the weekend, basically, want a quick look around Darwin, and go back home again. Is that the way you see things happening now with the cheap airfares from interstate?

Mr VATSKALIS: The estimate is that every time a tourist arrives in Darwin they will spend an average of \$180 in food, beverage and services. The other option is for them not to come up. If they do not come up, we do not have any money spent in Darwin. My preference is to see people coming for more than one day or one night or two days. However, I do not think that I am going to say no to people who are flying up on Friday night and going back on Sunday night. Every dollar and every room booked is good news for tourism in the Territory.

Mr WOOD: On, no, they are staying one night. They are coming up on a weekend. What I was wondering is whether you have seen a pattern of this happening since the cheap airfares came into being?

Mr VATSKALIS: The reality is people now, because of the cheap airlines, can afford to fly in and fly out instead of staying in miserable weather in Melbourne or Sydney. However, you have to remember people from Darwin fly for the weekend to Singapore because of the cheap airlines, and they come back. It is a new trend that we have to live with. As I said to you before, I would rather have 5000 people coming for two nights than not having anybody coming for any night at all.

Mr WOOD: I just think there is probably an opportunity for that inner loop of Litchfield, if you can call it that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It has been sealed.

Mr WOOD: No, I am talking about Litchfield Shire. Why I am saying that is because, believe it or not, there is a huge amount of untapped beauty close to Darwin that I do not think that we are tapping into enough. Take Knuckeyes Lagoon. If I told you where you could go and see pelicans, geese and water lilies five minutes from Karama Shopping Centre, you would say, 'Where?', because it is not being developed. We are not promoting those. It is a beautiful area. Knuckeyes Lagoon goes from Secrett Road right through to the Stuart Highway. It is about 2 km of wetland. You go around to my part of the world - besides not being able to swim in Howard Springs - you have Howard Springs Nature Park, Girraween Lagoon, McMinns Lagoon ...

Mr VATSKALIS: What does Litchfield Shire Council do to promote this natural beauty that is within its boundaries?

Mr WOOD: I will tell you what they do, minister. Litchfield Shire is the one local government that has protected these areas from overdevelopment. In the case of McMinns, they have a management board, with manages that ...

Mr VATSKALIS: But do they physically advertise it, with pictures or something through Tourism Top End? I worked for local government in Port Hedland. Port Hedland Town Council used to advertise for tourism, with the interesting point of the big boats coming down the harbour, or the big trains. I was ...

Mr WOOD: Minister, I know you always quote the local government in Western Australia. To be honest, I do not know you understand the granting system. Western Australia local government, per capita, get huge amounts more money from the Commonwealth because of the way the grants are given, than the Northern Territory. I can pull you out the book of Western Australia local government ...

Mr VATSKALIS: But we do not have local government yet, but we are getting there.

Mr WOOD: No, no, the funding is done on population, minister. The funding is much better for you in Port Hedland than it is for us in Litchfield. Litchfield is a simple council and only looks after the basics, but it does do one thing: it does retain those wetlands and creeks where it can. It would be good if it worked in partnership with the government. However, I do not want to get into an argument about that.

There is a lot of beauty and heritage. Why I keep promoting the bicycle path is because I see that as a great opportunity for tourists who can, at the same time, see the heritage of our North Australian Railway which has a heap of history to it. Just ask Trevor Horman. Yet, we are not really doing anything. We have the Strauss Airstrip, Hughes Airstrip, Sattler Airstrip ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Tourism NT is happy to work with anybody who wants to promote other things in Darwin, outside Darwin, near Darwin, or at Litchfield. For us, people can fly up here and stay overnight, but hiring a car to go to see these things benefits the Territory and Territorians.

Mr WOOD: I am not here to make too big a statement. I am saying that, maybe, now we are getting people coming up for the weekend, there is an opportunity to look at local tourism outside of Darwin. They do not have to go to Kakadu, they can have a quick trip around. The reason I am saying this is because, when I went out for this trip - and I will tell you why I was asked in a minute - they were surprised at the number of tourists who were now wanting to go on the Jumping Crocodile Tour they had never had previously. This is something the department could look at to see whether it needs a bit of promotion, and maybe encourage businesses in the Litchfield area, because there are more tourists and those opportunities.

The reason I raised this Jumping Crocodile Tour issue was that, that particular manager has a long stretch of road going through the old Beatrice Hill farm to get to his lease. Of course, there is a lot of

maintenance required and, if you get a flood, as it did for a little while this year, he has problems with the road. At the next Jumping Crocodile tour down towards the old rice farms, more to the north, which is going downstream, he also has the same trouble. Is the tourist development projects grants the sort of thing those companies could apply for to upgrade infrastructure so they have all-year-round access?

Mr VATSKALIS: Is that a public road or private road?

Mr WOOD: No. I am pretty sure the one going through Windows on the Wetland is not public, because it is going through the old access road through the Beatrice Hill Experimental Farm. I am not sure about the one to the north. What they were asking was whether there was money available to upgrade infrastructure that would allow them to operate all year round, which they have not been able to do?

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot give you an answer tonight, because I do not know if the road is private or public, the length, who is the most appropriate department to look after that area.

Mr WOOD: So, if you have ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Usually, we provide infrastructure only on the place where people base their business.

Mr WOOD: So you are not sure whether the tourist ..

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot give you any more details ...

Mr WOOD: All right. I will speak to those people.

Mr VATSKALIS: After we have provided the details, we can either see what we can do, or we can refer them to the appropriate department.

Mr WOOD: I spoke to two businesses and said: 'Look, if you would like to make a time to talk ...

Mr VATSKALIS: They can talk to us, or we can refer them to the appropriate department if it does not come under our jurisdiction.

Mr WOOD: All right. Thank you, minister.

When the train first came to Darwin, I must admit, I got up in parliament and asked about a rail motor with a carriage going from Darwin to Katherine, that would be able to stop at Pine Creek and Alice Springs, and the people said 'hoo hoo, ha ha'. I read an article in the *Katherine Times* just recently, where you said exactly the same thing. You thought that would be a good idea, too. Do you think that something like that would help promote tourism in the Top End, especially with the fuel prices the member for Greatorex was talking about? Is it a possibility?

Mr VATSKALIS: I strongly believe that a train to Katherine will be valuable if it is promoted properly, especially for the day trippers, especially during the Dry when you have significant numbers of backpackers here. If the cost is relatively cheap, they can jump on the train, go down to Katherine, or stop wherever they like. It would generate more opportunities for people. They could get off in Batchelor, meet with the local people, they could go to Katherine for the day. If they left at 7 am they would be in Katherine by 10 am and would be able to spend four, five, six hours in Katherine and come back by 7 pm. It has been done in other places; it can be done here.

You have to remember the railway is there for everyone to use as long as they pay a fee. From my experience in Western Australia - and I refer to Western Australia because, on many occasions, Western Australia is ahead of us, especially in tourism - people bought their own rolling stock, their own engines, they restored them and they ran them as a tourist train. You have to book three months in advance to actually being able to board a train from Perth to Toodyay. They combine it with five-course dinners, old restored carriages, and that was very popular.

However, we are not talking about that, we are talking about a railcar service they have in other places, and I think people should consider it. But, again, you need the people with the will, the ideas, the initiative and imagination to do it.

Mr WOOD: Perhaps we could lease a train for a while and just see how it goes.

Mr VATSKALIS: Feel free. If you want to lease ...

Mr WOOD: Have you got \$1m for an engine? We will call it the Kon Express.

Mr VATSKALIS: You have to remember – and if you go to Larrimah you will see it there in the museum – that there was a railcar service in Katherine in the 1960s. It was one of the first airconditioned railcar services in Australia, but it was not patronised and closed down.

Mr WOOD: It has many opportunities with things such as the Adelaide River races. You could fill a train to there, no problems at all. People could get back without having to drive, which is probably a good idea after the races. Minister, I think that was all.

Mrs MILLER: Member for Nelson, a passenger train would be just lovely, but I know a feasibility study was done on it prior to the mine being built and, while the scenario may have changed now with the price of fuel which would make it more attractive, it was not feasible. Great idea, love it, but ...

Mr VATSKALIS: There was feasibility study done by the railways?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr VATSKALIS: And they said it was unprofitable?

Mrs MILLER: That is right. He is going to put a train on there, so that is okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Things can change but, as I said before, sometimes people have to make decisions and use their imagination. Unfortunately, no one has come along to suggest something like that but we do not know what will happen with it.

Mrs MILLER: It would be lovely. I agree with you. There is something I would like you, minister, to revisit. It would come under the heading of indigenous tourism entrepreneurs - crocodile safari hunting. Is that on the agenda again? It appeals to a high-yield tourist niche.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. When I was in NRETA I suggested it. We put a submission to the federal government. Unfortunately, the minister did not listen to us and listened to somebody else from Queensland. He said no. The then minister was Mr Campbell. He refused to consider the proposal for safari hunting, despite the fact we are allowed to kill 600 crocodiles a year in the Territory legally and despite the fact that it would provide enormous opportunities for indigenous people because there would be many crocodile hunters prepared to pay \$5000, \$10 000, \$20 000 to come here.

If somebody presents the same proposal, I would strongly support it because, not only would it provide skills and income for people who need it most, but it would also be a good tourist attraction for the Territory. Our crocodiles are protected so our suggestion was only to kill crocodiles from the population of 600 that we are allowed to shoot every year.

Mrs MILLER: I agree with you entirely. Is it something you can promote, as the Minister for Tourism? Now that you have a very friendly cooperative, relationship with the federal minister, do you think you could go back that path again because ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It has to come from NRETA, not from the Minister for Tourism. It has to come from some people who are proposing something like that. But, as the Minister for Tourism I assure you I would support it.

Mrs MILLER: That is good because we are missing out on a huge market and there is a demand for it. I would very much like to see that developed as an indigenous tourism outcome. It frustrates me that we have 600 that are killed every year and are just wasted. So, I shall speak sweetly in his ear when I have him for estimates.

I noticed that you talked about The Ghan. You are doing more promotions for them. How are you getting through to them because they are only interested in selling passenger seats, from what I can gather? How are you promoting the Territory through The Ghan?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have to say that we have a very good working relationship. The recent footpath we opened in Katherine indicates The Ghan is interested in providing a good project. They are not only

interested in selling tickets because it is better for them to sell tickets from Adelaide to Darwin without stopping anywhere else. Obviously, they are stopping, and are bringing 300 to 400 passengers to Katherine twice a week, who stay for six hours spending money. That is a good indication that they are doing something for the Territory.

The launch of the Southern Spirit, which caters for the high end of the market is significant for the Territory because it is going to bring the high rollers of the tourism industry who are prepared to spend a lot of money. We are very happy to continue working with The Ghan to promote the Territory. The Ghan is an icon. People see The Ghan and do not think about Melbourne, they think about the Territory. That association is good news for us. Any news is good news for the Territory that comes from a tourist product like The Ghan.

Mrs MILLER: So, the relationship between tourism and The Ghan has improved? At the time The Ghan first started trundling through the Territory it was: 'We were not worried about promoting the Territory, we were worried about getting our passengers from Adelaide to Darwin and having some stops. If you guys want to do something, that is fine'. It just seemed to be this indifference towards promoting tourism with The Ghan. Has that changed?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Ms Tetlow.

Ms TETLOW: We work pretty well with The Ghan. In particular, we do a green season campaign with them every year which they run, basically, in their low time, to try to encourage people to travel up from Adelaide, through Alice up to Katherine and into Darwin during that time of the year, because they can afford to do that a bit cheaper. We sell a lot of tickets through Territory Discoveries, the GBD. We would probably be the biggest agent of theirs, if you like, by selling their tickets. We do have some influence in that regard and, generally, it is a cooperative relationship now they are over that initial phase. When they first started, obviously, they were very focused on what they had to get done, but now they are doing things like Discovery Walkways in Alice Springs and looking at how to beautify the actual experience.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Four-wheel drive tracks, minister. Will you look at four-wheel drive tracks in the Top End, not just down through desert areas? Would you look at one from the extension of - and how many times have I said this? - the Edith Farms Road through to Douglas Daly? The roads are pretty much there, you just have to have some sort of rough access across the Edith.

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you give me some information about that? I do not know about it. I do not mind driving through ...

Mrs MILLER: Okay. I will give you some ...

Mr VATSKALIS: The reality is a lot of people associate four-wheel driving with desert country in Central Australia.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I know.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Binns Way is going to take people from South Australia, through Central Australia, all around the smaller parks, and finish at Timber Creek; which is actually near Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to consider any other suggestions. Let us know, and I will be happy to even drive it to see if it is nice.

Mrs MILLER: It is a different experience than Central Australia. There is some beautiful country out there.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to consider it.

Mrs MILLER: It is beautiful country. It is just the access across the Edith, of course, is challenging. It is not going to be available all ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Like the Mereenie Loop.

Mrs MILLER: Not quite as bad as the Mereenie Loop. It just needs to be an access that could be utilised for at least eight months of the year. It does not have to be through the Wet Season.

Mr VATSKALIS: Just give me some more information on that. I would like to have a look at it.

Mrs MILLER: It is very beautiful country through there, and it is a shame that we do not use it. It would open up the Douglas Daly area quite well.

I think that is all I have - oh no, just one last thing. This is my last estimates because, as you know, I will not be around for next time.

Katherine Regional Tourist Association no longer exists. I cannot let this estimates go by without saying how disappointed I am the association - that I personally have put a lot of heart, soul and money into as part of promoting Katherine over the years - has reached this point. I had some reservations about it when it was first founded. I found it a little threatening, like everybody. I was a little sceptical as to how Katherine and its tourist enterprises could be promoted. Well, people absolutely love them. From my experiences I am finding it has worked quite well. I want to know what you plan to do with Alice Springs? Are you planning on doing a similar thing with it, or are you going to keep it as it is right now? Are you dispensing with Tennant Creek and Katherine and just having the super tourist associations like Top End and Central Australia? Is that what you are going to do?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Ms Tetlow.

Ms TETLOW: Yes, basically, we will have the Top End being the main Regional Tourist Association. That does not mean, as you have already highlighted, we will not still have the VIC, the Visitor Information Centre in Katherine. Similarly, in Alice Springs, we will have Tourism Central Australia, and they will help, if you like, market the Tennant Creek area. Again, there will be a Visitor Information Centre there. Part of the commitment was that we dedicated Kate Foran, who is the Tourism Development Officer and is based in Tennant Creek. Similarly, we have Melanie Reichlmeier in Katherine. They both love that area of the world. They are now important parts of helping to develop the region. There was more emphasis on the fact that we can do some marketing from an umbrella point to cover all that area, but the actual development on the ground needs more on-the-ground support. That is Melanie and Kate's jobs. That is why they report to us and are part of the whole development team.

Mrs MILLER: I have not met Kate but, of course, I have met Melanie. She has immersed herself into the Katherine region, boots and all, ever since she has been there. I do not think she has put her head down; she has been so active, and discovering a lot about the region. When you say that she is there to develop the area, what is her actual role? Is she there to develop or help new enterprises develop? Or is she just there for a short time to keep us happy that development is going to happen or continue to happen? What is her actual role?

Ms TETLOW: She is employed for this purpose: her role is not just to develop new things, but definitely to help the product that is already there to refresh, because we have all identified, particularly in Katherine, that hotels and the motels need a going over and a 'freshening'. That is an important component of what she is doing. Also, to give the tour operators advice and feed in that research to help them adapt to all the changes that we have talked out, with people changing their behaviours on how they travel, more environmental sustainability issues, and how you take into account what people are expecting these days. That is part of her job; to be out there with operators to help them go through that transition.

Then, of course, you have Nitmiluk and all the plans that are occurring at Katherine Gorge, which are very important for Katherine, as well.

Mrs MILLER: To continue from that, if she identifies the potential for something within Katherine, does she come along and see the Sirolli people to work out how to develop it, or does she come to back the Tourism NT, to speak to you, about how it should be progressed?

Ms TETLOW: What would happen is, if she gains information like that and a lead, if you like, on someone who is interested in further investing into the town, then Richard Austin, General Manager, Destination Development, and the team overall, would meet with anyone of the calibre you might be talking about. We would help guide them through then. She would be our eyes and ears in the town and, then, we would take it through the right avenue to get the results we need.

Mrs MILLER: And the results that Katherine needs, too?

Ms TETLOW: Absolutely.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr VATSKALIS: I have to admit that the pamphlet they produced *Katherine, She's Gorgeous*, I was very impressed with it, and I would like that to be repeated. We have a sister city, Alice.

Mrs MILLER: We have always known she is gorgeous. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right, that concludes - unless someone has thought of something? No? - Outputs 1.1 and 1.2. That is probably all the Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions as well.

TERRITORY DISCOVERIES Business Line

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to Territory Discoveries. The committee will proceed to consider questions regarding the Business Line, Territory Discoveries, are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, just one. Obviously, with time, there is plenty to get through in housing, minister. With the Territory Discoveries website, I think I heard on the radio, suggesting that it would be rectified - this is the booking, the non-compatibility of the Qantas reservations - by the end of June, or close to it. I am wondering whether it has been rectified?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, I remind you this is the first website of its kind developed in the Territory.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I have no criticism of the website itself ...

Mr VATSKALIS: As you can understand, the new product has some teething problems. I am very pleased to advise you that I have been advised the software to cater for the booking has been uploaded to the system today. There will be some trials, of course, before it is finally available. I am very hopeful that it will be up and running very soon.

Mr CONLAN: So, those people in Central Australia or those looking for a flight to Central Australia will be able to book that through Territory Discoveries, will they?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, and even if they want to do it now, they can actually go the Territory Discovery website because they will be redirected to the relevant airlines services. The software has been uploaded to the service today and, following the trials that have to take place to confirm it works properly, very soon Territory Discovery web page will be the web page to book flights in and out of Central Australia.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, well, that is good news. That is all I have, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? All right, that concludes consideration of this Business Line. On behalf of the committee, I thank those who have attended to assist the minister tonight and thank you for your time. The committee will now move on to Housing.

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND SPORT

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Output 3.1 – Public Housing

Mr CHAIRMAN: I note from our schedule, minister, you are now available to take questions on Output Group 3.0, Housing and Infrastructure, which sits within the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and, if you wish to do so, make an opening address.

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. First, I would like to introduce my colleagues, David Ritchie, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport; Dwayne McInnes, Chief Finance Officer; Lesley Cameron, Program Director Remote Housing Reform; Rick Harris, at the very end, Program Director of Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program; and Fiona Chamberlain, who is the General Manager of Territory Housing. If it is necessary, I will call up other officers to assist us at the appropriate time.

As the committee would be aware, the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport takes in three main portfolio areas. To make some efficiency here for the committee, I will field whole-of-government questions around finance, communications and staffing.

As you are aware, Mr Chairman, we have a strong commitment to housing. We backed that with \$585m, aggregate spend since 2001, and budget 2008-09 continues in that vein. I am looking forward to questions from the committee. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before I invite questions, I just note for *Hansard* we have the Leader of the Opposition, Deputy Leader of the Opposition...

Ms CARNEY: And former Leader of the Opposition.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A full house. Also, the members for Nelson, Macdonnell and Stuart. Are there any questions relating purely to the opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: No, due to the time constraints, no, I have none.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will also mention that, given we have had a couple of breaks, we will just go to 11.05 pm to make up the bit of time we lost, minister. Just so everyone is clear.

Mr WOOD: Can I get a point of clarification, minister? This annual report of Local Government, Housing and Sport has Housing Services in it. Then, you have the Territory Housing Annual Report. Do you have two hats on, or why are there two annual reports?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to my CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: David Ritchie, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. There is a Government Business Division which is Territory Housing and, then, there is a normal part of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport that also deals with aspects of housing. There is a line in the department that is the community service obligation which is paid through to the Government Business Division. The answer is that we deal with both in this output.

Mr VATSKALIS: Two hats.

OUTPUT GROUP 3 – HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Output 3.1 – Public Housing

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 as they relate to the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. I now call on questions relating to Output Group 3, Housing and Infrastructure, Output 3.1, Public Housing. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Output 3.1, did you say?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Public housing?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Public housing.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. The generic questions, Mr Chairman. I do have some but there are nowhere as many as those we have had in other outputs.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I prefer to stick with the general thing of those going into the Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions and sticking with the lines. Where we have had minimal lines, I have allowed it, but we had quite a breakdown previously.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, how many public houses have been sold since 2001? Could you break that up by sale of units, houses and the city and towns where they were sold?

Mr VATSKALIS: The only thing I have to bring to your attention from Output 1.1, Public Housing jumped to Output 2.1 which is actually Business Line. I am very happy to respond to that, but do you want to wait until we get to that Output 2.1?

Dr RITCHIE: This is just what I was talking about. In the department, Output 1.1 is just the Community Service Obligation; the cash that goes to the business divisions. These questions will fit in Output 2.1. It goes to about Output 3.1.

Mr WOOD: Could I ask about Output 3.1, Public Housing and Infrastructure.

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, that is the same thing.

Mr WOOD: So, we have Output 2.1, Public Housing and Output 1.1, Public Housing?

Mrs MILLER: So, we are not going to answer that one now? Is that right?

Mr WOOD: Why do we not just cover Public Housing?

Mr CHAIRMAN: In relation to Territory Housing, even though it is split up, it will be dealt with simply as a Business Line. So, questions under the Business Line will come altogether, rather than having to be split. It is only, in your schedule, that is in blue for Housing and Infrastructure. Perhaps if I could just ask again for that clarification on what you see as coming within this first part, just so we have it clear.

Dr RITCHIE: In what you have down as Output 3.1, the bulk of that is the Community Service Obligation money that goes to the government Business Division, which you have as your Output 1.0, I think. Output 1.1 is the area where all the statistics and everything on what is done by the division - houses built and all that sort of stuff.

Mr CHAIRMAN: So, what will we be missing, for example, if we were to simply go straight down to the Business Line?

Dr RITCHIE: Nothing. Nothing at all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Dr RITCHIE: Trust me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, I propose to deal with it this way: to simply, for the sake of formality, go through Output Group 3.0, not have questions through that, and then not disallow any questions later on the basis they should have come up under Output Group 3.0.

Dr RITCHIE: Just to be absolutely clear, there is nothing on the Public Housing that we would miss, but there is the Remote Housing, which comes up as Output 3.2 and Output 3.3. I take it you have not jumped all the way down and miss all those, that is all.

Mrs MILLER: So we are safe in asking Public Housing questions?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Later.

Ms CARNEY: So we need to deal with the chunk, correct? So, Gerry? Do you want to ask questions on Remote Housing?

Mr WOOD: I would like to. Well, I think it is important.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right, so anything in relation to Public Housing, we will deal with under the Business Line.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. As number what?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 1.1. Basically, when you get down to the Business Line, you have Territory Housing, Business Line, and then that is broken down into Outputs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4; and then you have Business Line underneath that, and Outputs 2.1 to 2.4. In my notes dealing with this, that is artificial and it is simply a Business Line like there have been previously. Questions in relation to the Business Line,

regardless of where they might fit, will all be dealt with just as the Business Line. What I understand we are being informed on is Public Housing, which appears at Output 3.1 and will be covered by that but, Outputs 3.2 and 3.3 would not be. Is that correct?

Dr RITCHIE: That is correct.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, so let us close off Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 - Remote Housing Reforms

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will move to Output 3.2, Remote Housing Reforms, and see how we go, inviting questions. Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: I do not know about reforms, no.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Just quickly, can I ask, minister, is Remote Housing Reforms including indigenous housing?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, that is correct.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is that dealing with issues like the cost of housing and reducing the cost of housing?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a strategic indigenous housing infrastructure project. The reality is, what we want to achieve, especially with the Alliance contract, is to build as many houses as possible for the lowest price possible. We are trying to avoid what happened at Wadeye when, because of the stupidity of the previous government's minister, it meant houses were built for \$900 000.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister, that might have been a poor decision, but it is not isolated. There have been lots of houses built in the Territory that have been well over the average. The previous minister, the member for Barkly, was passionate about trying to reduce the cost of housing, especially in the materials, the design, and the methodology used for employing architects and that sort of thing. What has your department done over the last year to reduce the cost of housing?

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: The cost of building equivalent houses in the bush in the last few years has been about 40% higher than it is in the major urban areas. In recognition of that, the strategic housing intervention project, which has bundles - getting on to \$800m over four years - is being designed and is just going through a tender selection process. We are aiming to reduce housing prices and putting incentives in place to do that, so we are getting houses delivered in the bush for something approximating what we are getting as current rates in towns. At this stage, we are still in the tender process for that. The buying power of that project gives us the opportunity to change the way business is done in the bush. We can provide further details of that, but this is an overview.

Mr VATSKALIS: You are right; in the past a house cost a lot of money because governments had built one house in this community, then they built another two houses in another community 100 km away and, then, another house in another community 100 km away. What we want to do is to work out the number of allocated houses to a community so there can be bulk orders - materials, transport, and people can be organised altogether. All of that and more can be worked out at the same time on the project, rather than working this month here and, then, going to work somewhere else and having to remobilise for somewhere else. Bulk ordering, people working on the same project, will bring the price of houses down.

Mr WOOD: Minister, are you saying you are going to buy kit homes?

Mr VATSKALIS: I did not say that, I said that a house can be built by blocks. If we order 1000 blocks, the price might be different than if we order 10 000 blocks.

Mr WOOD: I think of the house-making facility at Wadeye. Would those sorts of facilities - where they were making their own walls - disappear because of this bulk-buying process? Would they lose that individuality and just become part of a great big conglomerate?

Dr RITCHIE: There is no incentive just for bulk buying. The outcomes we are purchasing, as a government, are basically threefold: (1) is getting houses at the best price; (2) is getting employment and training of local indigenous people while we do it; and (3) is having the design appropriate to those communities. The way it must be done - and we mandate this in the tender process - is that an alliance is formed between us, the government, as the purchaser, the construction provider, and the community. The best possible result and, possibly, the most economical result, is actually having local solutions done by local people. If we can get that working, it would appear to be one of the best solutions.

While they are done as one-offs or a few houses in the community, they have tended to produce some great short-term results and, then, floundered because there is no continuity to keep them going. This project, because of the scale and massive finances - it is three or four times the kind of money that has been spent in the regions over the last few years. We are talking about a four-fold increase and guaranteed for the four years of the program.

Mr WOOD: We are short on time, I might ask for a briefing at some stage to make it easier.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes Output 3.2

Output 3.3 – Strategic Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Program

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Strategic Indigenous Housing Infrastructure Program.

Mr WOOD: None for Output 3.3.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Nelson.

Output 3.4 - Indigenous Essential Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I call on questions in relation to Output 3.4, Indigenous Essential Services.

Mr WOOD: I will ask a question in that area. I know you are looking at different ways of providing electricity to communities, through solar and wind power. Can I ask you about wind generation? I visited Epenarra last year and saw a single wind generator there standing still. Have you any idea why that wind generator was not working, and is it ever going to work?

Mr VATSKALIS: I understand what you are asking, but I cannot provide you with a reply on why it was not working, or what was wrong with it. Let me look at it and we will come back to you.

I have been advised that it was a private project. The company that constructed the generator facility went into receivership and we cannot get hold of the equipment because it is private, it is not ours.

Mr WOOD: It does not look a good advertisement for a sustainable energy supply.

Mr VATSKALIS: The reality is Power and Water has done many assessments about wind generation. The only promising area is somewhere around Tennant Creek.

Mr WOOD: That is where Epenarra is.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. However, we are doing trials to find out if it is efficient. The difficulty is that we are not Albany in Western Australia, where they have wind blowing all the time to generate power, so we have to accept the limitations of the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Obviously, we are still going to rely fairly heavily on diesel, and with gas ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Gas.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but at the moment you are relying on diesel.

Mr VATSKALIS: Actually, we do not use diesel at the moment, because the weather conditions have changed, so the consumption of electricity has been reduced significantly. We do not even use diesel in Darwin.

Mr WOOD: I am talking about remote communities; we are talking about Indigenous Essential Services. I am presuming that most of those generators are diesel in remote areas. Are you trying to find an alternative source of energy, gas, in the form of LNG or natural gas?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe in some places, the use of solar power coupled with diesel, is more promising than wind turbines. However, we are trying to do everything we can to reduce the cost of running these generator facilities. Any community close to a place where we can pipe gas, will be converted to gas. Other areas would be like Ali Curung, where a combination of solar and diesel facility seems to be more appropriate than gas supply.

Mr WOOD: I would like to ask more in that area, but time is getting short.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Nelson. That concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will ask formally if there are any Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions, but I think we will probably have anything there in the Business Line anyway.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – TERRITORY HOUSING Output 1.1 – Business Line

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to the Business Line, Territory Housing. Minister, I am assuming you will not need to change any personnel at the table, in which case you have already made the opening statement.

The committee will now proceed to consider questions regarding the Business Line. It should be noted that the schedule of appearances detail individual areas to assist members considering items of expenditure but, as Territory Housing is a Business Line, I do not intend to work through this list and, as such, questioning from members can be on issues of policy or be of a general nature. Are there any questions? Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: We are finally there. Thank you very much to all the staff, too, for being so patient and waiting out there for so long. I know it is a very long time. I am probably going to rush through some of these questions because I want to get as many in as I possibly can. I will add a bit to the question I asked originally. Minister, how many dwellings were there in public housing in 2001 and how many have been sold since 2001? Could you break that up by the sale of units, houses and the location where they were sold?

Mr VATSKALIS: Stock at the beginning of the financial year 2001 was 6092 dwellings. Stock at the 2007-08 year to date is 5319 dwellings. We had additions to the stock, which we have to do all the calculations for to provide some information. As regards to the stocks you are asking about now, from 2001 to date, I think we have to do some calculations to provide you with information, as well.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: However, I have to say that there are variations of how many sold, because some of them were sold to tenants, some of them were sold at auction. Since 2001, the majority of the houses sold were sold to tenants and an increasingly lower number of dwellings were sold at auction. Overall, the stock at the end of financial year 2001, was 6015; the end of financial year 2007-08, 5298. However, the biggest disposal of public dwellings took place in 1999-2000 when 460 dwellings for sold. Since then, there has been a significant decrease. For example, year to date, the reduction to stock was 38 houses, of which 29 were sold to tenants and only six went to auction.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Are you able to give me the breakdown from 2001?

Mr VATSKALIS: To give you more information, 65% of the properties sold by our government were to public tenants who are now new homeowners. This figure has now increased to 88% for the financial year. The majority of the houses sold were sold to people who were already living there and not at auction.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, what does the Corporate Real Estate Division do? What do they sell and how successful are they?

Mr VATSKALIS: David.

Dr RITCHIE: Look, I will pass this one to our Executive Director of Housing, Fiona Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Corporate Real Estate is responsible for managing our asset for Territory Housing – so, the whole life cycle of the asset. It focuses on planning for the asset. It focuses on repairs and maintenance for the asset. It focuses on development of new assets and on the disposals, as well as, sometimes, acquisitions of assets.

Mrs MILLER: Right, thank you. And so, you are responsible for ensuring government housing is available within regional remote areas, too?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: You do that as part of your real estate?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We do. The remote housing currently will be handled under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program because we have a specific construction and repairs and maintenance program being rolled out under that new Commonwealth initiative with the \$647m. But, yes, once those houses become our houses, that area will be responsible for the lifecycle management of those houses.

Mrs MILLER: And that is for government employees, as well?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Including government employees.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, a media release on the 31 January this year by the Chief Minister said in part: 'Mr Henderson said the government would continue to play its part in supporting housing availability and affordability for Territory families'. Minister, this was a direct result of bidding wars caused by desperate renters. How does selling so much of that housing stock support the promise to keep housing affordability for renters? That is the percentage that you do not have now for the low income renters - not those you have sold to previous occupiers?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Katherine, the majority of the houses we sell are actually sold to tenants who already live there. They pay a very minimum rent because ...

Mrs MILLER: What about the all the others?

Mr VATSKALIS: What all the others? For example, this year we sold 38 houses, and 29 of them went to tenants. The houses which have reached the end of their life, or would take an enormous amount of money to bring them back to standards, we dispose of. If you go around and look at the houses we dispose of, they are not giving us back \$0.5m; they are giving us a small amount compared to other similar sized houses. In addition, all revenue raised from the sale of public housing is reinvested in social housing initiatives. We put that money in significant upgrade programs and to construct senior villages. We put the money back into public housing. It does not disappear somewhere into the ether but is reinvested into public housing.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, is it correct that Territory Housing owns a block of flats in Runge Street, Nightcliff? Is it true these flats are currently vacant? Could the minister please tell me why these flats are vacant and what are your plans for them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Fiona Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: The Runge Street complex - we have a special project going on there. We have emptied out a block of units. We have done some work on those units in order to let them to Team Help so they can provide a specific managed accommodation service for their client group, which is far better placed in housing with support than just in housing where they are expected to look after themselves without support.

Mrs MILLER: What people are we looking at there? What are you talking about?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We are talking about people with mental disabilities.

Mrs MILLER: So you would be working in conjunction with a government department like Health?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: And with a non-government organisation, as well, that is actually providing the support to those tenants. That is Team Help.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, thank you. That has clarified that. Sorry I am rushing through these, I am aware of the time. How long, minister, is the waiting list for housing: by (a) the Territory centre; (b) units ;and (c) houses? Who is on the waiting list? What size of families are on the waiting list?

Mr VATSKALIS: The waiting times as of 30 April 2008, depends on where you live and what kind of accommodation you want. For example, one-bedroom accommodation in Alice Springs would be 15 months waiting list ...

Mrs MILLER: Excuse me, minister, I do not want to be rude, but is that in a form that you are able to table?

Mr WOOD: It is on the web.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking him.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because it contains other information not relevant to what you asked. If you go to Katherine, it is only a 12-months wait for one-bedroom accommodation. If you go to three-bedroom houses, in Alice Springs, it is 14 months, while in Katherine it is 13 months, and 29 months in Palmerston. Again, it is a combination of what kind of accommodation you want, and where you live.

Mrs MILLER: Will you table that, minister?

Mr VATKALIS: I will have to copy, then table it, yes.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, why does it take over six weeks to occupy a vacant house?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry? Over six weeks? You have to remember every time a house is free, you cannot just move people in because it has to be inspected, cleaned, and upgraded where necessary before we put a family or a person there. We have a duty of care and we are very careful what we do. The other problem is you cannot just click your fingers and get the contractors to do your repairs, or even the cleaners. We are waiting for them to come in and clean. Many houses, after the first few years, need repair and maintenance. Six weeks is a reasonable time. We are not going to pay top dollars like the person privately. A person will call an electrician to come and pay a \$300 call-out. We are trying to repair and maintain any house within existing resources before anyone moves in.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, that leads me to the next question. I do not have it written down but it was highlighted over my back fence. How many times do you have to go back and completely do a house - the same house at the same address over again at a considerable amount of money, and still have it vacant for six weeks or more? How many Territory houses do you have to go back and do that to?

Mr VATSKALIS: If you can provide some details, I can come back to you. You have given me generic information now. I do not have the details. If you give me the details, probably there must have been a reason for that, so I can find out and come back to you with that information.

Mrs MILLER: There must be more than one. There must be plenty of these houses which you have to go back and spend a lot of money on, over and over again, repairing them.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, as I said before, I do not know why this happened. If you give me the details, and the address, we will look at it. I will find out and come back to you. But ...

Mrs MILLER: There will probably be a list.

Mr VATSKALIS: You told me a situation, I presume in Katherine, behind where you live. I do not have the address. I cannot tell you why. It might be a series or problems, it might be pest problems, it might be an infestation. I cannot tell you anything. Give me the details and the address of the house and I will be happy to look into it and come back to you.

Overall, the Territory is the most efficient manager of houses in the whole of Australia. People down south wait for years - and I am not talking about one or two years; I am talking about five, 10 or 15 years - to be allocated a house. Here, when a house is vacated, we inspect it and, if something has to be done, we do it, and we reallocate it as soon as possible.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, we need to have a talk. Are you talking about public indigenous housing in this area, as well?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It was probably covered but, in light of what I said to you earlier, if you only have a couple of questions ...

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will allow it on the basis that you were not asking questions; you were waiting for this area.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, how many remote houses do you have, at this point, compared to the beginning of the budget cycle last year? Why have you dropped so many of the details of the performance measure in this area from the budget papers? It is very difficult to follow.

Mr VATSKALIS: I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Just to take the last part of your question first. The reason the outputs are changing is because there have been some very major changes to the way indigenous housing in remote areas is being managed. From this year on, housing in remote communities will be managed in the same basic way as the Territory Housing stock in the major centres. The effect of that is to, basically, more than double the size of Territory Housing stock. Initially, it will involve taking on managing the houses in all the Commonwealth intervention communities. With that preamble, Fiona will be able to just - maybe we can go back to the first part of your question.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We have, in fact, 90 additional houses this year than we did at the beginning of last year.

Mrs MILLER: Where are they located?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Across the Territory. In regions - I am trying to see if we can give you those numbers. I do not think we have the actual places here, but we could provide you with those.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Do you need that as a question?

Mr CHAIRMAN: To take it on notice?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Question on Notice No 6.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, if you could restate the question please?

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Would you be able to provide me with a list of the remote indigenous houses that have been established in the last 12 months?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to take that notice?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 6.2. If someone would like to just note the question number, it makes it easier for us to track. Thank you.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the Commonwealth Grants Commission calculated the disability for the Territory, in terms of indigenous housing, to be around \$95m. What amount of that money - that is, not

including money from the Commonwealth and other means - has found its way into indigenous housing that is provided to indigenous people in remote communities?

Mr VATSKALIS: Can you read the question again? Sorry, I am just ...

Mrs MILLER: Yes. The Commonwealth Grants Committee calculated the disability for the Territory in terms of indigenous housing to be around \$95m. What amount of that money - that is, not including money from the Commonwealth from other means - has found its way into indigenous housing that is provided to indigenous people in remote communities?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Territory government has spent \$100m in indigenous housing.

Mrs MILLER: So, \$95m of that has come from the Commonwealth Grants Commission?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. The Territory government has spent \$100m in the Territory to build indigenous housing.

Sorry. Yes, you are right. The Commonwealth put \$95m, we put \$5m, so that makes it a total of \$100m.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, that is what I was trying to get clarification on. So \$5m from the Territory government?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: That adds up to \$100m.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is it.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: The Commonwealth put in \$95m, the Territory government put \$100m, we put \$20m a year for five years.

Mrs MILLER: Over five years?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have put \$100m in.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, it was ...

Mrs MILLER: And that is over five years?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, thank you. How much will be spent on indigenous housing this year? How much is Commonwealth money provided through CHIP, which is the Community and Housing Infrastructure Program' how much is provided from the National Aboriginal Health Strategy; and how much is Territory money?

Mr VATSKALIS: Dwayne McInnes will respond.

Mr McINNES: Dwayne McInnes, Chief Finance Officer. Out of the Australian government-funded programs, CHIP will provide \$17.3m, the RAHP will provide \$20.5m. NAHS is discontinued in 2008-09, but will be replaced by other funding programs that are currently being negotiated with the Commonwealth. There is additional money in the NT government contribution; that is \$20m that will go in this year, as well. In addition to that, we also have, under the Strategic Intervention Program, additional monies going in there. So the total for 2008-09 is \$127.8m from all sources.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. So the difference of those - the first three you have given me is the Strategic Indigenous Funding, is that right?

Mr McINNES: Yes, plus the NT government contribution, as well.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, should not you, as Minister for Housing, be demonstrating your government's support for environmentally-friendly housing by reducing greenhouse gas omissions in your public housing? You have public housing with electric hot water systems and not solar. It follows public housing should also have light globes replaced by eco-friendly globes. What are your plans to ensure public housing is brought up to environmental standards expected, to not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions but to reduce the cost of electricity?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we agree with you and we are looking to replacing all this power hungry devices. However, the reality is we cannot go and do everything at once because there would enormous costs to public housing replacing something that is functioning now. But, as they come to the end of their functional life we will be replacing them. That is what we are currently doing in Darwin.

As for the globes, they do not belong to Housing. The tenants can replace the globes when they burn out. I strongly encourage them to do so because they save money replacing the normal globes with fluorescent globes.

Mrs MILLER: So, with public housing - just to clear that up, so to make it really clear - as their electric hot water systems fail they will be replaced with solar power?

Mr VATSKALIS: It will be replaced with solar power.

Mrs MILLER: In indigenous and in non-indigenous communities?

Mr VATSKALIS: After the 1 July, every house that will be renovated or constructed in these communities will come under Territory Housing. A new house will have solar powered hot water systems rather than electric ones.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. I notice in your performance measures that, 12 months ago, you exactly predicted the outcome of all of your performance measures. Is that just remarkable management, minister, or is it just cut and paste from the last budget to the final estimate? If it is that remarkable, minister, can you tell me what horse is going to win the Darwin Cup and the Melbourne Cup?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not want to share the profits with you.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, that was a bit of light-heartedness. Minister, why has the bond assistance scheme been pared back over the past three years?

Mr VATSKALIS: Fiona Chamberlain will answer this.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: There has been no paring back of it. What has happened is there has been less uptake. It is not that we have not made the money available; the money for bond assistance is available. In a market where rents are rising, it is more difficult for people on lower incomes to access cheap rental housing, which means they are less likely to uptake the bond assistance program.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, and that is the end of my questions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the Ross Smith Hostel is going to be closed down soon, I gather. I am told about 100 people lose their abode. Minister, in Darwin and Casuarina, for a one-bedroom pensioner home unit, you have nearly a three-year wait, and the same for Palmerston - a 39-month wait. You now have less public housing than you did in 2005-06. Where are these people going to go?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding from the 100 people housed at the hostel, there are only about 20 that have not found their own accommodation. The department is working very closely with them to find accommodation because a lot of these people are quite old. My understanding is that the department is looking to acquire a suitable accommodation to house these people until such time as they find their own accommodation or can be relocated to other suitable homes - a senior village or something like that.

Mr WOOD: Minister, what is the government doing in a climate where there is a very high cost of land and living ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We have bought suitable accommodation that we will make available to these 20 people.

Mr WOOD: It is only those 20 people. Minister, you remember when the Sundowner Caravan Park closed down and many people had trouble finding accommodation. That is over a year-and-a-half ago. We have high land prices, high housing prices, high rental prices, waiting lists of three years and over, and we have a reduction in public housing. Is the government policy not upside down in helping people who are caught up in this, you might say, economic boom, and simply struggling to find a place - even find a caravan park that will take them? What is the government going to do about public housing so we do not have these huge waiting lists?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, you are well aware that when we make available new land now, like Bellamack, the government has already declared openly and publicly there will be houses for senior people - affordable and public housing. I know it takes time to build these houses, because it is not easy, it is not quick. Even if I want to build a house today, it will take time. In 50% of the allotments in the Palmerston suburb of Bellamack, there will be social and affordable housing and a 44-unit seniors village. We will do the same in the Larapinta area of Alice Springs. We will include housing for entry level first homeowners, and a small seniors village.

The government is trying to resolve the issue but, at the same time, with the high cost of building, acquiring land and finding people to build these houses, is not very easy. We continue to see this promise coming back because it is something that you get when you have a booming economy.

Mr WOOD: Minister, we have worse waiting lists now. I remember a lady from Humpty Doo who came to see me, wanting to get a pensioner one-bedroom house in Palmerston. I think she had to wait 36 months. The people who were looking after her in Humpty Doo were running out of time. Now, it is 39 months. We do have a boom. The Chief Minister talks about the gas coming to Darwin, we talk about surpluses and record GST, yet, there is a group of people missing out on this boom. Surely, that is the responsibility of the government; to make these waiting lists a lot shorter - not just in Bakewell - by a concerted effort, such as the Commonwealth is doing with remote housing, to change this? There are poor in our cities. There are people who are struggling to get a roof over their head. The government, which I think has the job, is not providing a service I believe it should be providing.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, the other thing you have to remember is the Territory population is growing. Since 2000, the population has grown by 22 000 people. Not only do we lack the people to build the houses, but materials, wages, everything has become very expensive. Then we have increased pressure because people come from down south and they expect Territory Housing to provide a house.

That does not happen in other jurisdictions. Other jurisdictions have made a conscious decision that the only people entitled to public housing are people who are sick - invalids, pensioners, carers, all those in need because of health reasons. Everybody else has to find their own house. Territory Housing provides houses to people with low incomes as well, not only to sick people. You cannot blame the government for not doing well. We are trying our best, we are trying to build new houses. Even the government, as a whole, is trying to develop land that will include social and affordable houses. However, we have a combination of factors that work against us at the moment.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is it not true that St Vincent de Paul recently said they are giving out swags to people, because they cannot afford accommodation - even tent sites at caravan parks, which people are having to now use. Sommerville Community said that is where people are going, because they do not have enough emergency accommodation. We are now putting people into caravan parks and they are having to use a tent. Surely, if this is such a rich society, with big gas booming and GST coming out our ears, the government needs to make a concerted effort to do something about it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, the government is doing something. However, you have to remember, when we did not have a boom, like in 1999-2000, people were leaving in droves. We did not have this increased pressure on public housing. Public housing pressure starts from people in the urban centres coming back again to be in this boom society. That puts more pressure on our infrastructure.

It does not happen only in Darwin; it happens in Perth, in Queensland, and it is going to happen everywhere else, because this set of circumstances with a boom society creates enormous growth in population very quickly. The governments are unable to meet the demand because there is no way you can build houses in a week or a month or two months.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, we are out of time.

Mr WOOD: Could I just say that we are different from Perth and Sydney.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are - we are better choice.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but we look after ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: On that note, thank you very much, minister. That concludes consideration of this Business Line. On behalf of the committee, can I thank you and all your officers for attending the late night session.

The committee suspended.
