

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

In committee in continuation:

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good morning, everyone. I welcome the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General 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.

MINISTER TOYNE'S PORTFOLIOS

Dr TOYNE: Mr Chairman, first of all the department officials with me are Greg Shanahan, the Acting Chief Executive Officer; Terry Dreier, the Executive Officer Corporate Services; Sue Oliver, the Executive Director of Legal Services and Legal Policy; David Lisson, Director of Litigation; Malika Okiel, Director of Fines Recovery Unit; Gail Fleay, the Registrar General and Public Trustee not here currently; Gary Clements, Deputy Commissioner, Consumer and Business Affairs; Jens Tolstrup, Executive Director of Correctional Services; and Stephen Jackson, our statistician.

At the outset, I would like to make a couple of points which I believe the committee might find helpful as this morning progresses. It is the intention of these proceedings to examine the budget from my department and to respond to questions which impact on the budget and that is the focus of this hearing.

The 2006-07 budget papers provide significant audit detail relevant to that financial year and the output budget data is provided in Budget Paper No 3. Budget Paper No 3 provides information on the budget detailed down to output level, and we welcome questions on any such data.

The committee should be aware that the performance information contained in Budget Paper No 3 was actual data recorded up to and including the third quarter of 2005-06 and extrapolated to the full year. The financial information provided is based on actual data from the Government Accounting System and, in most cases, is current as at 30 April, 2006.

Last year's Budget Paper No 3 recorded an output cost budget of \$127m for the Department of Justice in 2005-06. In this year's Budget Paper No 3, the output cost estimate of the 2005-06 is reported to be \$136.4m; the difference being \$9.4m. This figure is the difference between the budget amount provided for the commencement of 2005-06 and the budget position recorded around the budget preparation time of 2006. In other words, the figure of \$136.4m is the Treasurer's statement of the Department of Justice's 2005-06 budgetary position at the time of preparation of the current budget.

The major variations which make up this \$9.4m is as follows: \$2.9m to meet the cost associated with higher prisoner numbers; \$2.6m to meet the actual costs of the Crime Victims Assistance Scheme; \$1.7m special purpose Commonwealth funding carried forward from 2004-05; \$0.42m to meet the costs associated with acting and recently retired judges and magistrates; \$0.3m to meet the costs of the increased remuneration of magistrates; \$0.38m to meet the costs associated with the Murdoch case; \$0.6m to meet increased costs within the courts; and \$0.25m to implement new business licensing and compliance system in Consumer and Business Affairs.

Significant budget adjustments have been provided for in 2006-07 in relation to the following outputs: \$0.2m provided for the alcohol court; \$0.12m to establish a Crime Victims Services Unit; \$0.17m to cover additional costs associated with increased activity in the Fines Recovery Unit; \$1.13m to increase the capacity to provide legal services to NT government agencies; and \$0.07m to support licensing and compliance registered system within the Consumer and Business Affairs.

I can assure you that this government takes its commitment to assisting victims seriously, and I give up-front some details of the changes to the Victims of Crime Assistance Scheme. Budget Paper No 3 on page 98 shows a decrease in the assistance to the Victims of Crime Assistance Scheme within the 2006-07 budget of \$1.1m. This figure needs some clarification. The budget in 2005-06 was actually \$3m; however, towards the end of the year our appropriation increased to \$5.6m to reflect the actual amount paid out in compensation and legal costs under the scheme at that time. This figure is recorded in Budget Paper No 3. That has been our practice for quite a number of years now; to appropriate an initial amount to the scheme and then to top up to the actual outcomes of the financial payment to victims. The scheme is, in effect, uncapped and subject to variation each year.

The 2006-07 year will be a transitional year for the Victims of Crime Assistance Scheme. Once the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* has commenced, no new applications for assistance under the old scheme

will be available. For a time - and at least for the next financial year - payments will be made both under the terms of the old scheme whilst those applications are finalised, and under the new scheme in respect to applications made after commencement.

It will be some time before the full picture of the budgetary impact of the new scheme will emerge. In particular, it is not possible to correlate the number of current matters in which the applicant received less than \$7500, as being the number of applicants who will no longer receive financial assistance because of the threshold under the compensable injuries component. The current available data only indicates the total amount paid to the victim for both pain and suffering for the injury and financial loss. The figures for payments less than \$7500, therefore, reflect only this composite amount. Under the new scheme, even if the compensable injury does not reach the threshold, financial loss - for example, out of pocket expenses for personal items, medical expenses, loss of wages and so on - will be still payable. In addition, the new scheme provides for exceptional circumstances payments; for example, relocation expenses may be made as an up-front payment. A component of the total amount currently paid in respect to claims under \$7500 will, therefore, continue to have a budgetary impact on the scheme.

In addition, under the new scheme there will be ability to provide up-front payments for financial assistance of up to \$5000 whereas, under the existing scheme, actual payments can take up to two years to be paid. With the more rapid assessment process under the new scheme, and up-front payments, we would expect to have some impact on the overall budgetary figure in the initial phase because these payments would be processed more rapidly, while the remaining old scheme applications also continue to be paid out.

Also, the new scheme applies a significant increase in the maximum amount of financial assistance available, moving that maximum from \$25 000 to \$40 000. Again, in the short-term, some disproportionate effect may be seen in relation to payments for the maximum amount. Victims of crime who have suffered serious injury prior to the commencement of the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act* may decide, not unreasonably, to delay an application for assistance and lodge under the new scheme so as to obtain greater assistance. Conversely, those with minor injuries may well decide to and be encouraged to lodge claims before the commencement date. Each of these matters would be expected to skew the budgetary figure in the initial phase.

For 2006-07, an amount of \$4.5m has been allocated to the Crimes Victims Assistance Scheme, whereas in the past few years, the allocation including Treasurer's Advance have been in the order of \$5m plus, which figure includes almost \$2m in legal costs.

In due course, the annual budget outlay for the new scheme will have greater clarity and will be a matter considered as part of the review of the scheme that is legislatively mandated under the first three years of operation. The actual annual budget adjustments for the Victim of Crime Assistance Scheme is a Treasury decision, but it should be noted that, regardless of the published budget for this particular item, all costs associated with the scheme have been fully funded by the government every year since the Department of Justice commenced operation in 2001.

Mr Chairman, I am now happy to take questions to myself or agency staff.

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

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 - LEGAL SERVICES

Output 1.1 - Solicitor for the Northern Territory

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Department of Justice. I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Legal Services, Output 1.1, Solicitor for the Northern Territory. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Good morning, Attorney-General, and good morning, others from the Department of Justice. Unlike previous years in estimates, I propose to spend not as much time as I have in previous years on the Department of Justice allocation. There are several reasons for that. One is that we have only four-and-a-half hours to ask questions in relation to all of minister Toyne's portfolios. We need to prioritise those and, whilst I am sure staff from the Attorney-General's appreciate just why I am very interested in what goes on in the Department of Justice - not only because it is my job, but also because I am a lawyer - due to other priorities, I will not be spending as much time as I might

ordinarily. Please do not think that that demonstrates a lack of interest in you or your department. We will be scooting through fairly quickly for my part, Attorney-General.

In relation to the first Output 1.1, can you advise how many staff are employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory? Provide their levels - if you have them in tabled form it would be appreciated. Also, how many of the staff are lawyers?

Dr TOYNE: At that level of detail, I will pass to my CEO. We will take it on notice and get it back to you. That is a very detailed question, and we need to get back to you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, Leader of the Opposition would you please restate your question?

Question on Notice

Ms CARNEY: How many staff are employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory? What are their levels? How many are lawyers?

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

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard I allocate that question No 4.1.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I will ask a couple of questions about legal costs paid in relation to the proceeding against former minister, Jack Ah Kit. Attorney-General, you will remember that we asked some questions about this last year. You were, with respect, less than forthcoming with some of your answers. Now that that proceeding has finished, can you please provide all details of all costs paid to other solicitors and, indeed, anyone else as result of the proceeding? Could you also provide details of how many solicitor hours were spent by the Department of Justice in the defence of the proceeding?

Dr TOYNE: I have provided that information as to the payments to the private sector firms associated with that case. In terms of the solicitor hours for the Solicitor for the Northern Territory, I will seek advice on that.

Mr SHANAHAN: We can provide that to you in a short time.

Ms CARNEY: That is another question on notice, Mr Chairman.

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

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I will.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, would you please restate the question, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: How many solicitor hours were spent in the Department of Justice regarding the defence of the proceeding against Jack Ah Kit?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to accept that question on notice?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I am.

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

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have a tabled document there, minister?

Dr TOYNE: I am tabling the payments to the private sector law firms associated with the case which is another part of your ...

Ms CARNEY: That is associated with that case? Okay, thank you.

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please continue, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Has the payment of \$1m in settlement been paid as well to the relevant party? What was the settlement?

Dr TOYNE: We want to check to see the terms of the agreement as to whether there was a confidentiality requirement. What I can confirm is that it was nothing like \$1m.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, I think I heard a whisper of \$100 000. Was that right?

Dr TOYNE: You may or you may not have.

Ms CARNEY: If you are going to claim confidentiality, we can say it was eleventy squillion dollars, can't we? How are Territorians meant to know how much we spent?

Dr TOYNE: I have said that we want to check to see what the agreement actually involved. If there is a confidentiality requirement, then we will honour that. Let us check that.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, in terms of scrutiny of the ...

Dr TOYNE: I am certain, in answer to your question, it was nothing like \$1m.

Ms CARNEY: Really, it is for me and other people in the Northern Territory to guess how much was paid in costs. We will not be able to find that figure anywhere in the budget papers anyway, will we?

Dr TOYNE: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, if I understand correctly, you have given an undertaking to have a look and see if it ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we will check back to see if there is a confidentiality constraint on it. If there is not, then we are quite happy to share the figure.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps before we finish this output area?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we will do that.

Ms CARNEY: I have not seen the document that you tabled. Does that include the amount of money payed to the plaintiff's lawyers in that case? Presumably the agreement was pay a figure and costs.

Mr SHANAHAN: We will just have to check with the agreement.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, now that I have received that tabled document, that does not include the amount paid out to the plaintiff's lawyers.

Mr SHANAHAN: It talks about costs of defending the action ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, for the purpose of the *Hansard* you should perhaps identify yourself.

Mr SHANAHAN: Greg Shanahan, Acting CEO. Just going by the heading it says 'cost of defending the action', so we do not think that it does include it. However, we will check and, if need be, we can provide that – subject, of course, to the confidentiality issue.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before any further questions are asked, we have been advised that the sound system is not recording all that great, so if we could have participants please speak clearly into the microphones for the purposes of recording. Thank you. Please continue, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Just to recap, we are going to get back to this because people will go and check. At this stage, we are waiting on information as to the amount of the settlement plus costs paid out to the plaintiff's lawyers. Correct?

Dr TOYNE: Okay.

Dr LIM: Is that a yes?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, that is available and we will get that information.

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister.

Ms CARNEY: You did not know the answer to my earlier question about how many lawyers were employed in the Solicitor -General's Office of the Northern Territory which is surprising. Does it follow that you do not know how that compares to how many solicitors were employed two years ago? How can you not know how many lawyers you have?

Dr TOYNE: We have lots and they get lots done.

Ms CARNEY: Lots. As they say in America, let the record show that the Attorney-General said 'lots'. I will ask that on notice if I may, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Will you take that question on notice minister?

Dr TOYNE: I am more than happy to chase that information for you.

Question on Notice

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

Ms CARNEY: What are the figures for the number of lawyers employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory two years ago and how does it compare to the number of lawyers employed in 2005-06?

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

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 4.3.

Ms CARNEY: Attorney-General, how many lawyers are employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory who do not hold practicing certificates?

Dr TOYNE: You are asking detail that I do not have. Answer – none.

Ms CARNEY: Answer none? Okay. Have any solicitors been employed by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory in the past 12 months who, at any time whilst undertaking their role, did not hold practicing certificates?

Dr TOYNE: Not that we know of.

Ms CARNEY: Have you been aware of concern in some sections of the public service that there are solicitors or lawyers working in other agencies in the capacity of providing legal advice who have not held practicing certificates?

Dr TOYNE: I am certainly aware of that. Recent arrangements made to build the capacity of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory to the tune of about \$1.13m of additional capacity - which would be 67 lawyers - has been done as a result of negotiations between DOJ and other government agencies under the auspices of the Cabinet and the Chief Minister. This is to provide a greater capacity within government for providing legal services to our agencies and to provide, if you like, better quality control over the practice of law by government. That has been partly as a result of cost efficiency arguments in the cost of providing

lawyer hours to legal questions within government, but it has also been in response to the varied level of the legal qualifications and background of other agency lawyers, not our own.

Ms CARNEY: As first law officer, I imagine that you would share my view that it would be unthinkable and most unsatisfactory - not to mention whether the Northern Territory Law Society implications may exist - for people to be working as lawyers in the public service providing advice to government who do not hold practising certificates. That is about as serious as it gets, is it not?

Dr TOYNE: The way we are viewing it is that it is important to have competent supervision of all legal work, and that the Department of Justice is clearly the agency that should take that role within government. The arrangements that have been made within this latest reform of our legal services follows an earlier reform where we rebuilt some of the capacity of our own Solicitor of the Northern Territory to better carry out government work. The previous government, particularly under the time of Shane Stone, actually stripped back the internal legal capacity of government - in our view too much - and left us subject to not so much the level of outsourcing to the private sector law firms, but our inability to fully set up the legal work and monitor and control it within government. That is my level. Greg wants to add a bit more to that.

Mr SHANAHAN: We are very conscience of that issue. One of things that we are doing at the moment is going around visiting each agency to determine what legal units they have to work out which parts of them should properly sit under the umbrella of Solicitor for the Northern Territory, those who do not necessary need to and, at the same time, looking at the practising certificates held by the various lawyers who are out there. It may well be that we bring them under our umbrella but outpost them and use that model as a supervision model.

Ms CARNEY: How many lawyers are currently working as lawyers and are in business of giving professional legal advice who do not hold practising certificates?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is this a whole-of-government type question?

Ms CARNEY: It is under the banner of the Solicitor for the NT.

Dr TOYNE: This one can go to Greg.

Mr SHANAHAN: That is part of this process; to actually go through and work out who is doing what for the agencies. The majority of them that we have discovered so far hold a Class III practising certificate, which is the in-house counsel certificate. That will be part of the whole review.

Ms CARNEY: Sure. I will not go on forever about this point, but is it the case that you do not know how many public servants are working as lawyers in various agencies giving legal advice, who do not hold a practising certificate?

Dr TOYNE: Look, we have a ...

Mr SHANAHAN: That is the process we are going through now.

Ms CARNEY: So you do not know. The answer is you do not know.

Dr TOYNE: No, no, there are two levels to this. The detail of particular work situations of people doing legal work in the various agencies is still being audited, but we have an overview which went to Cabinet. Cabinet made a decision on the basis of the overview that was provided. That did enumerate or identified legal positions in all agencies. That was the basis of the decision that was made in Cabinet. Therefore, we are not unaware of the scope of it, we simply want to know the level of detail agency by agency, of exactly what work has been done and what qualification supervision is appropriate to that. That is what the audit is now doing.

Ms CARNEY: Sure. However, with great respect, I believe you are saying the answer is no, you do not know, notwithstanding what you just said. Attorney-General, how long have you known that people are acting in the capacity for employers as lawyers who do not hold practising certificates?

Dr TOYNE: For the time that it has taken for that issue to be scoped out by my agency and to be turned into a submission to Cabinet. That is ...

Ms CARNEY: I was thinking more in real time like months, years.

Dr TOYNE: It would certainly be since the last election.

Ms CARNEY: Since the last election?

Dr TOYNE: In that sort of time frame.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So you have known for a year and you still do not know how many lawyers are in the business of giving legal advice?

Dr TOYNE: I said we know the scope of the positions; we are just now looking at the scope of the work – the actual detailed work.

Ms CARNEY: Have you had discussions with the Law Society about this?

Mr SHANAHAN: There has been correspondence with the Law Society on the issue. The point is that, whilst they may be lawyers, they may not necessarily be acting as lawyers or employees as such, and that is the issue that we have at ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I appreciate that, but you and I both know they are working as lawyers and they are into business of giving legal advice. You and I both know ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, there have been a number of instances in this last exchange where you are making assumptions and trying to validate and say that the minister and his staff have seen this. Clearly, they have not. They are giving you one position; that is the response. You can always ask a question to challenge that position, but to construe their words in another form is a bit disconcerting. I ask that you respond to the response given by all means, but to try to put another meaning on to what they say, I do not think is quite fair practice.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am sorry that you are disconcerted. I thought the people at the table were looking more than comfortable. When I ask a question about how long they have known, and I receive a bunch of sentences that does not give me months or a year, it is more than appropriate that I try to pursue that area. In any case, do you have a difficulty with that, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please continue. I will let you know when I have difficulty, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Well, you traditionally do. Okay. When will this be resolved? What sort of time frame do you have in mind?

Mr SHANAHAN: We think in the next three to six months.

Ms CARNEY: Three to six months?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Right. You appreciate, no doubt, that government is putting itself at great risk for lawyers to be giving legal advice without practising certificates. Surely there must be a way of fast-tracking this issue so that it can be dealt with much more quickly?

Mr SHANAHAN: As a point of clarification, I am advised that we are not aware of any lawyers out there who are giving legal advice who do not have a practising certificate of some ...

Ms CARNEY: But you knew of one at least?

Mr SHANAHAN: The issue there was whether or not, in fact, the position she was carrying out involved her giving legal advice. That is the issue we are exploring.

Dr TOYNE: That is what is being audited. We are just seeing whether the work that the people are doing actually constitutes formally offering legal advice, or whether it is work that the agency wants done that involves legal skills but will not necessarily have a formal advisory role.

Ms CARNEY: Sure.

Mr SHANAHAN: The three to six month time frame was more me thinking about how long it is going to take us to put the new model together, to do with that particular issue.

Ms CARNEY: Nevertheless, there is a concern as evidenced by the fact that an auditing process is being further undertaken?

Dr TOYNE: Oh, absolutely, yes. We want to make sure that there is an absolutely rationalised system right across government for handling legal activity.

Ms CARNEY: So many questions, so little time. I would like to finish with that particular output area, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: We are on 1.1?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are indeed, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I was just interested in the discussion about minister Ah Kit's legal case. When that issue came up in parliament, I was given a briefing at that stage - a so-called confidential briefing. I must admit, from that briefing which I do not think was necessarily confidential now because things have settled, I was of the strong impression that the government had acted according to the *Animal Welfare Act*, and that the way they had handled that situation, one could say, was correct. Why does it now appear as though the government was wrong, because it has now paid out a settlement to Mr Anderson?

Dr TOYNE: It was a very complex case in that it was not just simply a case of what was asserted to have happened. It was also, I guess, as in any case, the quality of evidence to actually prove the offence has occurred, as alleged - in this case, in a public way. All I can say is that, in our closure of this matter, it came down to the legal advice we got from our lawyers as to what was the best course forward in either pursuing the matter through the courts or to settle out of court, which is a normal judgment that has to be made. We were given the advice - and that advice subsequently went to Cabinet - that the best course forward, all matters and aspects considered, was to attempt to negotiate a settlement with Anderson, which was subsequently done. You do not pay lawyers to provide that sort of analysis and then tell them that they do not know what they are talking about. We received that advice, we acted on it.

Mr WOOD: From that, we really do not know whether the briefing I had was correct, because it was simply a case of pragmatism that you could have dragged this on for ever and a day, arguing your point and you had to come with a settlement?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, but the Ah Kit matter was a defamation matter. In the defamation matter we received advice as to the likely prospects of the matter and the best options for government to deal with it. I have said this ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please turn that phone off, Dr Lim.

Dr LIM: Sorry.

Dr TOYNE: It is very hard to concentrate with mobile phones going off. What was I saying?

It was a defamation matter, similar to several other cases in the history of the Territory, where a minister has acted without fear of favour regarding an issue within his portfolio. There has been standard practice of the government supporting ministers if there is subsequent action taken against them, provided that the action they were taking was in the context of their responsibilities as a minister. Essentially, the principle was the government as a whole supporting the minister in their role in this particular issue had to make a judgment as to how best to settle the matter. If the legal advice had said: 'We believe the best option is to pursue the matter through the courts and to seek a successful defence against the defamation case', no doubt we would have taken that advice. The advice we received, though, was to seek a settlement. You can call it pragmatic, but it is, basically, formal advice from our legal section as to what our best option was.

Mr WOOD: Minister, there is a highlight in the budget paper which talks about additional funding of \$1.13m for 2006-07 ongoing to increase the capacity of the Solicitor for the Northern Territory to provide legal services to government agencies. What legal actions are you expecting to cover with that money?

Dr TOYNE: The legal activity costs government agencies an incredibly diverse sum. It can be anything from cases involving alleged malpractice of our medical practitioners, to the contractual issues with the wharf development, to planning issues. It is a very diverse field on which legal work is being carried out. Some legal work, as we said earlier, is straight, formal legal advice by a lawyer, and other is work involving legal skills but not of a formal practising type; it could be just people with legal skills advising on contracts for employment for employees of the government agency or something of that sort, rather than being a formal legal practice. That is the reason why we are auditing all of those activities, to work out which side of the boundary they sit on, whether you are talking about work that should and does demand a quality control in the form of a practising certificate, or work that is actually more general in nature that has been done for that agency. There is also the issue that agencies are all specialised to different areas of service delivery so, obviously, the work can be quite unique in Education or Planning or other areas of government.

Mr WOOD: Minister, this is an increased capacity isn't it, \$1.13m? Could one say you are expecting more problems within agencies?

Dr TOYNE: No, no. What we have said is that when a lot of the legal work of government was outsourced under the previous government, our judgment was that it went too far; that it did not leave enough remaining capacity within government agencies to properly deal with legal work. You really need lawyers on the government's side to make sure that the lawyers in the private sector are properly briefed and their work is properly supervised by a qualified lawyer to protect our interests, otherwise we are at the mercy of the judgment of the private sector lawyers as to what suits our interests. It has really been a matter of rebalancing the internal capacity of government against our continued desire to involve the private sector in areas of legal advice and legal action that we may not want to keep specialised within government. We are trying to find that balance.

The \$1.13m additional capacity is coming from reappropriating from other agencies into Department of Justice. It is not an additional call on the budget as a whole; it is just simply a reallocation between the agencies.

Mr WOOD: One other area, minister. I stand to be corrected on this question. What involvement did the government have in the Larrakia native title case that has recently been defeated in the courts? What were the legal costs? Have the Larrakia people appealed? What involvement has the government in that appeal?

Dr TOYNE: We are certainly involved in that our lawyers were briefed out to represent government issues in those proceedings. As to the detail of it, I will need to take that on notice if you want actual lawyer hours or actual ...

Mr WOOD: I suppose I am looking at both the financial involvement, but also the reasons why you were involved. What position were you taking in relation to that particular case?

Dr TOYNE: Generally, we are involved across the board. We have a whole section that deals with land tenure issues. A lot of our involvement is to use the court processes to define exactly what our position is under those federal acts. Many of the actions that we are involved in is just to clarify what the act is saying, or means in detail to the interests of Territorians as a whole; therefore, what we as the Territory government want to be presenting in these individual cases. It has been a process both under the *Aboriginal Lands Rights (Northern Territory) Act* and the *Native Title Act* because no act fully defines all the context of which it is going to have impact. Often it has to be tested before the courts to clarify how it is going to play out at each context in which land tenure has been contested.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you a question on notice you wish to ask, Mr Wood?

Mr WOOD: I just ask that question as you can sort out which bits you are going to answer. If it is not applicable ...

Dr TOYNE: Well, I ...

Mr WOOD: I did not mean that in a bad way.

Dr TOYNE: We will certainly get at least the lawyer hours in that particular case or, alternatively, we can offer you a briefing on the general work of that section of DOJ if you are interested in doing that.

Mr WOOD: I would be very happy to have a briefing on that particular issue, because it is an important issue – it is an unusual ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, more than happy to arrange it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Arranging a briefing, member for Nelson. That is okay. Are there any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, one I forgot, Mr Chairman. The traditional one, I think we ask it every year. Frankly, Attorney-General you would miss it if it was not asked. During 2005-06 were any consultants, legal practitioners and others retained by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory? If so, please provide their names and how much each individual or company was paid, and detail the purpose for which they were retained. I assume you have that in a table.

Mr SHANAHAN: You do not want the purpose though?

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Dr TOYNE: Just the names and the amounts paid. We will table that. Yes, as we do every year.

Ms CARNEY: As I have said, you would miss it if it was not there.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Will Mr Logan be on there again?

Ms CARNEY: Do not know! I want to have a look.

Dr TOYNE: So you can check up on the ...

Mr SHANAHAN: There are actually three tables. One is the ad hoc expenditure, one is contracted expenditure and one interstate.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition. Have you completed that line of questioning?

Ms CARNEY: I think so, yes.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, a question to the Attorney-General.

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, where are we at with this agency. Still on the Solicitor.

Dr LIM: With regard to the action taken by Blue Cypress Oil in these columns. Where is it at, at the moment?

Dr TOYNE: It is really in limbo, I guess, would be the best way to put it. He agreed to have a mediation which was carried out by Tony Fitzgerald a year or so ago. Tony Fitzgerald examined all of the history of it, the alleged culpability of people like Mick Palmer and - who else was involved at the time? - several of the government ministers of the time. His assertion has always been that his interests had been misused by the CLP government.

The mediation provided an outcome which was offered to Mr Collins, but he did not accept that outcome at the time. He has now taken court action and, basically, we have to leave it there and just see what the courts determine. We have, basically, accepted that he is now seeking some remedy through the courts and we will meet him there.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regards to that output?

Ms CARNEY: The questions that we did not get to before. Do you have the answers in relation to the costs of the settlement for the Ah Kit matter, and the amount of costs paid to the lawyers?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are these questions on notice?

Ms CARNEY: No, they were going to get back to us.

Mr SHANAHAN: The one we have so far is the Ah Kit defamation issue. The settlement figure was \$100 000 and that included costs.

Ms CARNEY: Inclusive?

Mr SHANAHAN: Inclusive of costs, yes.

Dr TOYNE: You did well.

Ms CARNEY: It was a good deal. You did do incredibly well. \$100 000 inclusive!

Dr TOYNE: And we are being very careful about confidentiality.

Mr SHANAHAN: It is not confidential.

Ms CARNEY: It is still a lot of Territorians' money. Thank you Mr Chairman. That is the end of that output for me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No further questions on that output? That concludes consideration Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Agency Legal Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2, Agency Legal Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I have several, Mr Chairman, but will ask, perhaps, only one. Attorney-General, you have talked about the outsourcing of legal services and you mentioned Shane Stone's name. Shane Stone, I thought, did pretty well in encouraging the local professionals with outsourcing. You, obviously, take the view that the pendulum needs to come back the other way. Are you aware of concerns within the profession that the pendulum may, in fact, be swinging a bit too far the other way?

Dr TOYNE: I am sure there would be concerns in that we are taking work directly from the private sector back into government. I have heard two things. One is the inevitable thing of saying that we prefer to keep earning as much money off government work as was on offer previously. The other thing that I have heard is that they are wanting to see a more coherent partnership, I guess, with the government agencies and their legal capacity, so that their work is competently briefed out and there is no doubt about the work being done or not done up to the expectation. To do that, they understand that we need to get sufficient capacity within not only the Solicitor for the Northern Territory, but also government agencies as a whole. There is some understanding as to what we are trying to do. I have made it very clear that we are not ideologically against outsourcing in any way; it is just that we were trying to find the most effective balance point between outsourced work and in-house work.

Ms CARNEY: As first law officer in addition to your responsibilities to your department you, of course, have that responsibility to the profession. Are you aware of the numbers of private lawyers and private law firms currently in Alice Springs and Darwin?

Dr TOYNE: I visit and meet with them quite regularly.

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but I am after the numbers. Do you keep the numbers?

Dr TOYNE: I do not go round and count them, no. I am not arithmetically inclined. I would prefer to have a dialogue with the lawyers and their firms..

Ms CARNEY: Sure. I would have thought that you would keep tabs of the numbers. I am not suggesting that you go and count them,. However, I would have thought that your office would keep the figures because, surely you, as first law officer, and your colleague, the minister for Business, would be concerned if the number of law firms went down significantly and the number of private practitioners in the Territory went down as well. Everyone can do government work but they provide a service to the people in the Northern Territory. Would you consider keeping those numbers in future?

Dr TOYNE: I do not feel that this would be a problem simply because, in my last meeting with the Law Society, they recorded that they have no problem getting the professional liability coverage for our legal community, and that one of the key issues that they have had to deal with is the relatively small size of our

legal community. My memory is that there was something of the order of 400 lawyers in practice in the Northern Territory. If that was receding, they would be having more trouble getting the professional liability coverage, which they are not. They are finding that the law firms are gathering together within those arrangements again, so it seems that not only are we keeping our numbers up from that measure, but also that the law community is really getting greater harmony in working together.

Ms CARNEY: The Territory has always had difficulty, because of the relatively small profession, when it comes to professional indemnity insurance, so you would expect that always to be the case. I ask whether you would take on board this suggestion, because I really believe that it is something that the Attorney-General should have someone look at. Can you get the figures for the number of private practitioner lawyers in Darwin and Alice Springs, and the number of private law firms? I believe it should be tracked? Surely, in getting a balance right and getting that pendulum exactly where all of us want it to be, you can only do it if you look at the other measure, which is to ensure that the private sector does not diminish significantly. Would you be prepared to get someone from your office - and I do not necessarily need to know the answers, but I urge you to look at that and perhaps take it on at a 12-monthly basis? Your advisor up the back seems to be screwing up her face for some reason. I do not know why that is the case.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, I do not think that is of any relevance.

Ms CARNEY: I am sorry that your staff do not regard this as important, but I can assure you that the private profession does.

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment. Leader of the Opposition, I ask you to deal with the minister and the people at the table ...

Ms CARNEY: I am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not think there is any benefit to be had alleging any facial movement that was meaning one thing or another. Minister, will you please continue.

Dr Lim interjecting.

Ms CARNEY: Just do your job.

Dr TOYNE: Facial expressions aside, I see that as part and parcel of our ongoing relationship with the Law Society. They clearly have the job of monitoring the health and numbers within the profession, and with my relationship with them, I will certainly keep an eye on that.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. That is it for that output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to Output 1.2?

Mr SHANAHAN: I have some more on the Ah Kit defamation matter. You asked a question of how many solicitor hours.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just pass it over.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you give the total legal costs by your department in implementing the Lake Bennett (Land Title) Bill which you were involved in for some considerable time. It is mentioned in your annual report.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we are very familiar with it. It has taken forever, but yes.

Mr WOOD: I am very familiar with it. It is funny that I am dealing with it in the Department of Justice, of course.

Dr TOYNE: We only have the litigation costs available here. The other major part of the solution which was put in place was for mediation. We have to take it on notice to get that for you but certainly the solution was very much a mediated solution. We were actually trying to avoid any ongoing litigation.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, member for Nelson please restate your question.

Mr WOOD: Minister, what was the total legal cost of your department in implementing the Lake Bennet (Land Title) Bill?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr TOYNE: Yes I am. Total costs? .

Mr WOOD: Total costs, yes. Legal, in my laymen's point of view is, basically, what it cost.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we will accept that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I allocate that question No 4.4.

Mr WOOD: Minister, there is also a mention of a long-running dispute related to the expansion of the West MacDonnell National Park, I think, with the Lands and Mining Tribunal. Do you have any explanation of what that dispute was about? It is in the annual report.

Dr TOYNE: What does it say?

Mr WOOD: It says your department dealt with a settlement of a long-running dispute between a Lands and Mining Tribunal relating to a land acquisition for the expansion of the West MacDonnell National Park.

Dr TOYNE: Page?

Mr WOOD: Page 34 under Legal Service Achievements.

Dr TOYNE: We will get them to have a look. You will appreciate, I do not follow absolutely every matter that we ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is why you have your advisors here.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, for the purposes of Hansard, please restate your question.

Mr WOOD: Minister, can you give me details of the long-running dispute relating to a land acquisition for the expansion of the West MacDonnell National Park?

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

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes Hansard, I will allocate that question No 4.5.

Mr WOOD: That is all the questions I have, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in relation to Output 1.2, Agency Legal Services? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Legal Policy

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed with Output 1.3, Legal Policy. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: There are but in the interest of time I will not ask them.

Mr WOOD: What was that number? 1.3? No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 - Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed with Output 1.4, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: There are a lot of questions, Mr Chairman. However, given time constraints, I will need to write to the Attorney-General separately in relation to questions I have. I am reasonably hopeful that he can provide me with a written response. I think your record, minister, is about nine months, so I hope you can provide with a timely response. No questions, thank you.

Dr TOYNE: We are getting better.

Mr WOOD: Mr Chairman, just one question. Again, in the annual report for 2004-05, under Performance Measures, it says that you estimated you can meet 80% of client time frames, but you actually met 68%. Why, then, do you believe you can meet 80% of client time frames this year? It is on page 38 of the annual report, left-hand table, under Timeliness, Meeting client time frames.

Mr SHANAHAN: I am told that the figures in the past always exceeded 85% and the last year's figure was seen as a bit of an aberration. There was 82 clients surveyed and only about a quarter of those provided the valid points to that particular question. Six answered negatively, so it is a fairly small sample. You can be prone to wide fluctuations, so it is a wait and see thing; they still are confident that they will get a good result this year.

Mr WOOD: So, those figures are done through a survey. You are watching what happens with certain cases and you collect that data yourself? It is just done from a survey is it?

Mr SHANAHAN: That is done on a survey yes – that particular one is.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to output 1.4? That being the case, that concludes the consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – COURT SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Higher Courts

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Court Services, Output 2.1, Higher Courts. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: In the interest of time, no, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: One question, thank you Mr Chairman. Minister, last year you announced that you would investigate and review payments for jurors. Why has this taken so long and when will we see the results of the review? It is also in the annual report.

Dr TOYNE: I do not have the details here, but we certainly concluded that review. We offered changes of additional payments to some categories of jurors. I can get the detail of what that is, but we have certainly dealt with that issue since you brought it to our attention.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I am a little disappointed. I have raised this question through letters ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I know.

Mr WOOD: ... and in parliament, and I thought I would have at least been notified that the review was actually in process and ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question, member for Nelson, or a potential question?

Mr WOOD: Hold on. He just asked me a question; I am answering your question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, continue. You have to ask a question for the minister for provide answers to.

Mr WOOD: Mr Chairman, if you want to be so bureaucratic, I cannot hep that. The minister made a statement to me after I had raised the question. What I am querying is how come I was not informed that the review was completed after I had raised this matter a number of times in parliament. If I cannot make some preamble to a question ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, these are questions ...

Mr WOOD: ... and yet you allow other people here that preamble ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: You did have preamble.

Mr WOOD: If you have some sort of gripe against the Independent members asking or having a preamble?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, you were clearly making a statement. You just couched a question there, which I am sure the minister can answer.

Mr WOOD: Yes, and I would have done it short time if you had not interrupted me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. That is fine with me.

Dr TOYNE: Okay. All I can say to the member for Nelson is that we have dealt with that issue. I will get the information back to you about it. However, the important people that have the information are the jurors. Those arrangements have been settled and are in the process.

Mr WOOD: When you say the jurors, of course, you do not know who the jurors will be in future cases. Will the public know what the new conditions will be?

Dr TOYNE: If they are called for jury duty, they will have the conditions of that duty put in front of them and, at that point, they will be fully aware of it. That is all I can say. You brought a legitimate issue to us, we set up a proper process of assessing it, and we have made decisions. I cannot recall the detail of the change, that is all.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to Output 2.1, Higher Courts. That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Lower Courts and Tribunals

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Lower Courts and Tribunals. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: There are, but there is no time, Mr Chairman.

Dr TOYNE: Oh, come on. Ask us one.

Ms CARNEY: No, I want to get to some other areas.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Fines Recovery Unit

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.3, Fines Recovery Unit. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: Yes, Mr Chairman. A question on behalf of the member for Braitling. Minister, how much is outstanding in unpaid fines, and are there any people in gaol for not paying their fines?

Dr TOYNE: We are just getting it. Yes, we will table these, member for Nelson. In round terms, the revenue collected since January 2002 is \$21.503m or \$21 503 848 to be exact, which has risen by just over \$5m a year. The amount outstanding is \$2 824 830. We are doing pretty well. I can remember being on the PAC prior to the establishment of the Fines Recovery Unit and we were - sorry. Okay. This is in the current financial year, the \$2.824m. My memory of the PAC figures were about \$9m uncollected at that time. We are making inroads into it.

How many are in gaol? It has gone from 10 down to seven. I will table these because they give you the summary of the amounts outstanding and collected over the last three years, which are the figures I am now using. The number of people in gaol would be a very small number.

Mr SHANAHAN: I understand we cannot give you that figure because, whilst we have been told there is none that have been put in there as the result of FRU processes, occasionally, if someone gets a gaol sentence, their defence lawyer will ask that outstanding fines be worked off while they are in gaol. It is, generally, through their sentence for other offences as opposed to not paying the fine.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, currently there are three in gaol solely for fine default, but there others, as the CEO is saying, who are there for other reasons but also paying off fines. However, three are there purely because they defaulted on fines.

Mr WOOD: I am just trying to combine the question ...

Dr TOYNE: Down from 250, I might say, when we first started it.

Mr WOOD: I am just trying to combine two questions here. The member for Braitling asked has there been any consideration in recovering these fines in other ways; that is, direct debit from welfare pensions or community service. I add that in your annual report, you were talking about defaulters may be restricted from undertaking business with the Motor Vehicle Registry. Can you expand on those two questions?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we have not implemented the suspension of business elements. We do license suspensions. However, by the time those three people got into gaol, they would have gone through a huge number of options and stages to get there. It is really a point of last resort that we put people in gaol for non-payment of fines. My general belief is that the fine recovery is working well and that we are capturing most of the clients where it is practicable to go after the amount to be paid.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: That is all, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to Output 2.3, Fines Recovery Unit? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Community Justice Centre

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed with Output 2.4, Community Justice Centre. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, because of time constraints, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – CORRECTIONAL SERVICES
Output 3.1 – Custodial Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed with Output Group 3.0, Correctional Services, Output 3.1, Custodial Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: I have many questions, but I will ask one. Attorney-General, I would like to ask a question in relation to the sex offender programs that were recently introduced into Berrimah and Alice Springs prisons. I would like to know who runs them, and whether they are expert staff? How long do the courses last? What is the nature of the programs and when they started?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I will give you some detail that I have in front of me. The sex offender program or treatment program started in October in Alice Springs with eight indigenous participants. The program ran for a total of six months, and was completed in April 2006 following the development of individual relapse prevention strategies. The program was conducted by a psychologist and a treatment intervention worker, which was at FTE 0.5 equivalent, from the current prisoner rehabilitation team. The budget expenditure for sex offenders in 2006-07 was approximately \$331 340 in staffing costs. The budget requirements for 2006-07 will include salary costs for DCC and Alice Springs, recruitment of a co-facilitator for program delivery, maintenance of the evaluation framework for the sex offender treatment programs, and ongoing program development and staff training.

The program is planned to commence in the Darwin Correctional Centre in July this year, and suitability assessments of participants is currently being conducted. The program will be facilitated by two registered psychologists, and recruitment for the position not yet filled is under way. Future development of community-based sex offender treatment programs will need to be developed as a second stage to this intervention. Do you want to add anything?

A witness: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: Do I take it from your answer that the program in Alice Springs started in October 2005, ended in April 2006, and that there is no program currently operating there?

Dr TOYNE: No. It is just that that intake has concluded.

Ms CARNEY: It is ongoing?

Dr TOYNE: It is ongoing. We have funded it for this financial year.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. In Darwin it is due to start in July, correct?

Dr TOYNE: Next month, yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. When a person goes through the course as we have had in Alice Springs, how long does it go for? Is it five days a week for four weeks, or a couple of hours a month?

Mr TOLSTRUP: Jens Tolstrup, Executive Director, NT Correctional Services. It started out, in one day I believe it was seven or eight hours, later on it was divided into a couple of days during the week. We are talking about 6 to 18 hours a week, generally.

Ms CARNEY: Over what period of time?

Mr TOLSTRUP: Over a period of six months.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I have quite a number of questions here, and I will go as quickly as I can through them. Minister, is the low security prison at Berrimah now open? How many prisoners does it hold?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I will get Jens to answer that because they are operational issues.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you finished your questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr TOLSTRUP: The new low security area at Darwin prison will open on 29 June 2006 and it will hold, all in all, 130 low security prisoners.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask Mr Tolstrup, through you, Mr Chairman, if that is the total number of prisoners it was originally designed for, or is it less?

Mr TOLSTRUP: It is more than it was originally designed for. The new area is designed for 100 prisoners, but we have kept 30 bed space and other space up in the old low security area which is now one area.

Mr WOOD: Minister, from my visit to the prison -and I thank you for allowing me to visit - I felt that the womens' prison was inadequate. I will give a quick reason: I could see, for instance, there were different classifications of prisoners all together. Should the women prisoners be separated according to classification? Have there been any plans to upgrade at least the room or cell that is provided to prisoners who are at risk? There is one cell there that has arc mesh around the outside of it, which is, I think, a cell where prisoners can be watched in case they are at risk. Is there any program to build a purpose built facility for the women?

Mr TOLSTRUP: The female section of Darwin prison, called D Block, consists of a low security area and a medium/maximum security area. At the moment, we are holding 18 maximum/medium security prisoners and we have room for 16 minimum security prisoners. There are a few of the female prisoners in maximum/medium who are progressing to the lower security rating. There have been some modifications since it was built, and there will be consideration for future changes in the female block. Yes, we are aware of the problems that you mentioned; for instance, at risk cells and the like. It will be part of our planning for the coming years.

Mr WOOD: Will that also include an education facility? At the moment, they do not have an education facility separate from the rest of the premises.

Mr TOLSTRUP: There are rooms out there, but not very suitable rooms. The female prisoners can also attend education in the male prison under certain circumstances. Yes, adult education rooms would be on our wish list.

Mr WOOD: So, it is only a wish list, not an actual list?

Mr TOLSTRUP: It is not an actual list because it is going to be part of a master plan we are going to progress during the coming months.

Mr WOOD: As part of that master plan, is there going to be a new remand centre built including education facilities?

Mr TOLSTRUP: That will be part of the considerations but I cannot say what the outcome will be. On remand, as you might know, in the adult custodial review the recommendation was that we should actually use some low security and medium security areas also for those on remand. We will start looking into that.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I was told that women prisoners currently cannot participate in the community support program. The reason I was given was because the women were not to go out with a male driver. Is that correct? Has there been any changes that would allow women to go out as part of community support programs?

Mr TOLSTRUP: It is correct. In our rules it is stated that one male officer and one female prisoner will not be allowed. But yes, they can participate in the work parties and outgoing work, but it could not be one on one.

Mr WOOD: When I visited the prison they told me that they were not allowed out after that ruling. Has there now been a change that they are able to go out on community support programs?

Mr TOLSTRUP: I could not give you - I am not sure of the answer. My understanding is that it is possible, but I would like to give you a correct answer a little later.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to put that question on notice member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Question on Notice

Mr WOOD: Minister, why cannot women prisoners participate in the community support program and, if not, when will they be able to participate in those programs?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take those questions on notice, minister?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, sure.

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

Mr WOOD: Minister, on visiting the prison, I looked at the staff room set aside for the prison officers. My personal opinion is that it looks like it has not been upgraded since the prison was built. Are there any plans to upgrade the facilities for the prison officers at Darwin prison?

Dr TOYNE: I did the same. I visited the muster room myself subsequent to yours. I can assure you that area is going to be upgraded, because it is well below par. That will be done in the very near future.

Mr WOOD: Through you, Mr Chairman, on the same issue. The reception area seems to be an area that has been upgraded in stages throughout the years and arc mesh walls have been put up and all sorts of things have occurred. Have you any plans to also upgrade the reception area?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, as Jens Tolstrup said, we are trying to rationalise all of this. Berrimah is a very old prison and it is showing its age, there is no question about that. It does need systematic work done on it to upgrade it to modern standards. The obvious way to do that is to set up a proper master plan where we prioritise all of these issues together. I have been well informed about the reception area by the prison officers. That and the maximum security and remand area would be very high on the list of areas that we would want to look at. However, the first thing is to get the game plan together so that we can then deal with it through the government processes.

Mr WOOD: I move on to slightly different matters regarding the prison. Has the concept of the prison farm been shelved for the time being?

Dr TOYNE: We consider it to be a very expensive way to grow cabbages. We are certainly looking at alternatives to incarceration of a type that best connects certain prisoners to good vocational and regional outcomes. That work is in progress. I cannot really say in detail what those facilities or programs might look like. We certainly see it as very much in the future of Correctional Services that we will increasingly set up programs which are based on connection to economic development and community development around the Territory for prisoners of suitable type, or even as barred hostels or other arrangements. So, I can certainly say we are actively considering - and I think you have put up suggestions of this type as well. We are certainly seriously looking at them. It should not be too long before we can talk about what we are going to be doing.

Mr WOOD: Mr Chairman, I would say that with any government instrumentality that ran a vegetable farm, it would, obviously, cost more to grow a cabbage. Of course, that is not necessarily your main issue; the issue is giving people skills and keeping them employed.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I agree.

Mr WOOD: Minister, has the government looked at the work farm-type establishment as is growing in Western Australia at the present time?

Dr TOYNE: We have looked at matters right round the country and that is part of the exercise we are going through at the moment. What I can say is that we are looking at the manner of supervision and the style of the programs in order to maximise the potential for the employment outcomes when the offenders pass through the programs and back into the community, and getting benefits back to the communities as a

result of the programs. It is more of an extension of the community work party-type approach. However, the actual detail I will have to leave until Cabinet has had a chance to look at it.

Mr WOOD: In relation to some of the issues at Wadeye at the present time - and I am probably taking a bit of a punt here saying that if a certain number of these gang members who are causing problems are arrested and eventually brought to gaol, are there other ways that the government is looking at to handle people from these particular gangs, rather than put them in gaol where they could just form their gangs again? As you know, sometimes with Port Keats people, it used to be an initiation rite to go to Berrimah gaol. Are there alternative ways of incarcerating these prisoners in some other manner which would not allow this repeat of ...

Dr TOYNE: Undoubtedly, there are. We are trying to work more generically than to be looping into the Port Keats situation and using that as the way in which we want to pursue alternatives to the current gaol programs and sentences to gaol. We want to give the courts a process by which they can fully involve the community in handling the offender and their hearings. That is appearing with the community court trials where, obviously, if the community court is operating or, indeed, the circuit courts that the magistrates involve themselves in, there are opportunities for building arrangements over and beyond what we can do formally through the Correctional Services process and programs with the communities involved.

Therefore, right from the front-end of the handing of offenders into the court process, through to options the court might have other than simply imprisonment; we are looking at opening up those options at the moment. However, we would be doing that for all offenders, particularly young offenders around the Territory, as we have with the Youth Diversionary programs. For adults, there may have to be more stringency about it, but what we are looking for is options to involve the communities in the rehabilitation of the offenders, and to visit benefits on the communities, partly as reparation of the offences. That is a productive approach elsewhere, and it is one that we are seriously building up at the moment.

Mr WOOD: Quickly, Mr Chairman. Minister, I have received complaints from time to time from families of prisoners that prison meals were inadequate. Who assesses the meals for nutrition and quantity of the meal?

Dr TOYNE: Mr Tolstrup.

Mr TOLSTRUP: The meals are assessed by a nutritionist specialist from Health, and we are following the recommendations. Of course, we are very keen to see that it is a diet which is complete and covers the need for any prisoner.

Mr WOOD: In your annual report, you talked about the establishment of living units and prison industries. Could you please say what are living units and what prison industries are being implemented?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, living units are really the heart of the prison reforms that were brought to us by the CAYA Review. The living unit is an environment in which a sentence plan can be set up between an officiating prison officer and the prisoner. It offers the alternative to the normal prison environment which is security based, where the whole aim of the environment is to keep the prison officers and the prisoners separated. Living units is where you bring them together around the setting up of the sentence plan, and then the monitoring and implementation of that plan. The plan will indicate which prison, educational or programs classification steps that the prisoner will go through.

It is now to be supported by IOMS software, a computer-based system that we are purchasing from Queensland. That will allow a procedure - which currently takes a prison officer, when I talked to them, a matter of six or seven hours to manually set up this sort of program or plans - to be done much more efficiently through a computer-based system. It is the living units where those computer terminals will be, and there will be meeting rooms between the prison officers and the prisoners that they have charge of. It is opening up a new professional practice for the prison officers to become case managers of the prisoners around a sentence plan. The living units are the physical environments you need to actually do that. There will be one in the low security area at Berrimah as our first working area for this new process, and we are looking at the cottages in Alice Springs as the second immediate area that we want to set up as a living area.

Mr WOOD: Following on that, how many inmates are in the Alice Springs low security area? Has the expansion of this area been concluded?

Dr TOYNE: We have the overall numbers for Alice Springs, but I am not sure about the ...

Mr TOLSTRUP: The numbers of the so-called cottages in the low security area of Alice Springs prison is around 80. I cannot remember the exact figure. There have not been any changes to the area as yet, but we are hoping to put in more areas for staff and prison education.

Mr WOOD: You mentioned the CAYA review. How many of the recommendations have now been put in place? I am of the understanding that the union representing the Correctional Services officers passed a no confidence vote in the director. Has that caused any difficulties in trying to implement the recommendations of that review?

Dr TOYNE: First of all, in terms of industrial action, I believe it is all quiet on the western front. Currently, we have a very good working relationship with both the Senior Prison Officers Association and the Prison Officers Association. Recent things such as the muster room, have come out of that working relationship.

Regarding the reforms, it is a change process so, in the population of 408 or so prison officers, you are going to get all sorts of attitudes about doing things in a new way. There will be some who prefer to stick to the old ways of security-based prison work, through to people who are very enthusiastic about the case management approach to prison work, which is opening up a whole new professional practice for the prison officers as a group.

Overall, I can certainly say that there has been a lot of cooperation about setting up the new low security area at Berrimah. We are working constructively with the prison officers currently. There have been occasions where it has become hot, as people are afraid of change or there are uncertainties about things. However, I am fairly comfortable with the way things are going at the moment.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. This is my last question on this issue. Regarding prison industries, have you looked at the opportunity of bringing private industries within the confines of the prison grounds where they can actually run a smaller version of their parent company, you might say, so we can open up opportunities for prisoners to learn new skills and be employed, and, I suppose, reduce the opportunity to be bored in prison?

Dr TOYNE: We have to be pretty targeted. The outcome we are all wanting is rehabilitation outcomes so that people put in prison are less likely to go out and re-offend in the community and, in fact, more likely to take up a more constructive view of their place in the community. If you take that as a starting point, if you were going to look at commercial activities, it would be only as a means to an end, it would not be the end in itself. There are boundary issues there that are matters of policy regarding whether it is fair to have very cheap or free labour.

Mr WOOD: No, I would not recommend that all. They are on normal wages.

Dr TOYNE: All I am saying is that whatever we look at for the prison programs which are available to the prison officers as part of the sentence plan, as part of their case management, it would have to have a very strong rehabilitation focus; in other words, what skills are going to be most useful to prisoners going back out into the community to get employment and to live as a good citizen. That has to be the starting point. Also, there is the criminogenic factors such as sex offender and violence offender programs to try to remove the trigger points that are causing offenders to commit particularly violent offences.

It is that mix that we are trying to build into the programs. If there are business-type activities that are pertinent to that then, sure, we would consider them. That is more of an operational level of Jens actually implementing the reforms, rather than we come in at a policy level of just making sure that it interfaces with the Territory economy and individual business remains.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Dr LIM: I want to bring the minister back to the comment he made just now to the member for Nelson about the Integrated Offenders Management System. You plan to purchase that from Queensland, so when is that planned to be implemented?

Dr TOYNE: Almost as we speak, member for Greatorex. We are hoping to have the contract signed, sealed and delivered for the software in the next matter of working days. Certainly before the end of the financial year because that money has been allocated.

Dr LIM: At what cost please?

Mr DREIER: Terry Dreier, Executive Director, Corporate and Strategic Services. We are in the middle of negotiations. The figure we are looking at, at the moment, is about \$650 000 for a perpetual licence to use the application and all future developments of that application.

Dr LIM: For the life of the licence, that \$650 000 will give you unlimited support and continued development?

Mr DREIER: Support and maintenance will be a separate arrangement which has to be made, but all developments are made by Queensland, and at this stage any third party purchases or licensees of that application. Northern Territory government will have the option to use those developments free of charge.

Dr LIM: Up to when you implement the IOMS, what system is in place to manage your database and other IT services that are required in Department of Justice.

Mr TOLSTRUP: Basically, our case handling is on paper. That is the good thing that IOMS is going to change for us. We have different systems and we are, of course, connected to the IJIS and other systems, but this going to give us an overall one system for one thing. The main thing will be that you can actually have the case management reclassification and all these things in one system. It is accessible for any officer who needs it, including Community Corrections.

Dr LIM: Minister, I understand that there is an electronic database of sorts that has been used in Corrections. The director is saying that you are using a paper and manual system. What is this electronic database that is in favour at the moment?

Dr TOYNE: There it is a real patchwork of things being used. In my visits to the prisons and to the various operational areas of the prisons, you can see quite a few components that are being scratched together to provide a complete picture of the prisoner's situation as regards the classification, medical status, the actual rehabilitation programs that are seen and, of course, the prison history in behaviour and discipline and so on. It is not an efficient system. Talking to the sentence planners in both gaols, it does take up a huge amount of time to assemble all the different information to get a complete picture. That is what we are trying to cut through by having a single database, or a single system I should say.

Dr LIM: With the multiplicity of systems that you have across the whole of the Territory, how are going to import the information into IOMS, or do you intend to just discard the old information?

Dr TOYNE: No. I believe there are parts such as the IJIS details of the court outcomes for that particular prisoner, which can be interfaced into IOMS online I understand. Yes, they can be imported in.

Dr LIM: What about the rest of the information that is kept in all of their systems?

Dr TOYNE: Some of it – if it is on paper it is going to have to be imported into the system initially. However, after that, the upkeep will then be through the one system.

Dr LIM: Has an allocation been provided to ensure that all the data that you have - for God knows how many years - can be imported? I can see what is happening through a manual system - somebody bashing away on a keyboard to get information in. How are they going to do that? At what cost? What money have you put aside to do that?

Dr TOYNE: It is within the overall funding for the prisoner reforms which is a total package of all the different areas. One item, of course, is the introduction of IOMS software and the development of the case management based on IOMS. That would be within the global amount of the reform money.

Dr LIM: Attorney-General, you also said that in the living units you have prisoners being able to communicate with their Corrections officers electronically. Are you talking about using an internal network system, or an Internet system? Can you explain what you are doing?

Dr TOYNE: No. In living units, what I was saying is that it is a physical environment where the case manager or the prison officer acting as a sentence plan manager has regular contact with the prisoners that they will have responsibility for. Typically, there would be half a dozen prisoners to a prison officer. They will regularly review the sentence plan in the environment of the living centre. That, of course, will find its way into the records that are being kept within IOMS as those reviews are done. As programs are undertaken, the program presenters will, obviously, also enter their outcomes as well. It is not really your

suggestion that is an electronic network around all parts of the prison. It is not; it is a focal point within the living unit for the activity of sentence plan management.

Dr LIM: With the various systems that you have now, I assume you are paying a multiplicity of licence fees as well for the systems that you currently using for the database or databases?

Dr TOYNE: I do not know how much a Linedex notepad costs, but we use a fair few of them. There is someone – Terry might be able to answer that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could I please ask officers coming in to clearly state their names as we have had Hansard call up and told us they are having trouble recognising who is talking.

Mr DREIER: Terry Dreier. Dr Lim, there are a multiplicity of databases currently which exist which have built up over a number of years. They are predominantly access databases, and the licence fees fall within the normal desktop outsourcing contract.

Dr LIM: I understand also that with the databases, officers have now been told they are not allowed to use them anymore.

Dr TOYNE: Sorry?

Dr LIM: The current databases that are there in existence - they have been told not to use them anymore.

Mr DREIER: We have developed an implementation program which has a lifespan of about three years, which includes looking at data cleansing and data verification. Without being able to answer your question in the strict sense of yes or no, I would think that as part of the implementation program we will be looking at a cut-over period, and looking to cleanse that data prior to it going over and being able to assure ourselves at the end that, when we do go live on IOMS, that we can be certain that the data is accurate.

Dr LIM: Does the IOMS or the current databases that you have, hold information on officers themselves?

Dr TOYNE: No, that would go into the government ...

Mr TOLSTRUP: No, it is an integrated offender management system. It does not hold anything on the officers.

Dr LIM: the current databases do not hold any information on officers either?

Dr TOYNE: No, that is all done centrally through the government employment arrangements, through DCIS and so on.

Dr LIM: That information is freely available to officers if they want to have a look at their own information?

Dr TOYNE: I would imagine so. Yes.

Dr LIM: Not imagine so. Do they, can they, will they?

Dr TOYNE: Well, they have access to myHR and the other government employment databases to access their own record, as do all our public servants.

Dr LIM: All right, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regards to that output?

Dr TOYNE: I have an answer to one if that is ...

Mr TOLSTRUP: I have the answer to the question on women on the community work parties. Women can apply for work on the parties. Currently, there are two female prisoners working twice a week on the work parties.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was in regard to question on notice No 4.6. Thank you. Member for Greatorex, do you have a question?

Dr LIM: Yes. I mention that there was a swap for the member for Blain and member for Katherine. Also, tell me about the use of illicit drugs in prisons. What is the offending rate and how are you managing that?

Mr TOLSTRUP: We do not accept illegal drugs in the prison at all. We have a lot of procedures in place to try to avoid and control it. First of all, there will be access controls and things, but the main one would be urine and other types of testing of the prisoners. We are doing that on a regular basis so that, in a quarter, 10% of the prisoners will have been tested.

Dr LIM: In terms of tobacco, the Northern Territory government has received a Dirty Ashtray Award again, as per normal. Do you have any programs in place in the gaol?

Dr TOYNE: Oh, come on, we have got away from ...

Mr TOLSTRUP: There are no overarching programs, I guess. However, the medical service on an individual basis will talk to people about tobacco. You are allowed to smoke in the prison.

Dr TOYNE: I just add that, in getting a Dirty Ashtray Award, we continued a fine tradition set by the CLP for many years.

Dr LIM: Well done. With regard to smoking in gaol, it is, obviously, in well-ventilated places, or do you have a special room for the smokers? What is the ...

Mr TOLSTRUP: It depends, of course, on which area of the prison you are in. If you are in your cell and alone you can do it, or you can do it in the open areas, or the outside areas. I am not aware of restrictions except for work, of course, and related items. Yes, you can smoke during the day.

Dr LIM: Regarding occupational health and safety for officers who are exposed to cells or to prisoners who are smoking, how do you address that?

Mr TOLSTRUP: It is a concern. We have not addressed it in that respect, because the closed parts of the prisons are very confined space.

Dr LIM: Precisely!

Mr TOLSTRUP: Yes, it is a problem.

Dr TOYNE: Prisons, by their nature, do separate prison officers from prisoners in most circumstances indoors. Therefore, there is that degree. However, I agree with you; there are issues that need to be looked at. Whether there are solutions is another question, but we will certainly have a look at it.

Mr WOOD: I did leave a question out. Minister, why isn't the increase of \$1.68m for increased prisoner numbers reflected in the variation between 2005-06 and 2006-07 in Custodial Services? You will find that reference in the budget paper.

Mr DREIER: Sorry, could you say the first part of that again?

Mr WOOD: Why is not the increase of \$1.68m for increased prisoner numbers reflected in the variation between 2005-06 and 2006-07 in Custodial Services?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, this is between the initial appropriation and the estimated final outcome?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I think that is. I am just trying to find it – too many bits of paper.

Dr TOYNE: In my opening speech, I indicated there was \$2.9m which had been provided to meet the high prison costs. Were you talking about last year's budget or this year's?

Mr WOOD: It was referred to under the Budget Highlights, page 96. It was additional funding of \$1.68m.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I have it.

Mr WOOD: Is that reflected from one year to the other under Custodial Services?

Mr DREIER: The answer to the question is, yes, it is. It is reflected in the variation between 2005-06 and 2006-07. However, offsetting the overall change in that output were a number of one-off items which were funded in 2005-06 which were not funded in 2006-07. There is, in fact, an increase of \$1.608m to Corrections' budget in 2006-07, but it has been offset by items which, be they a one-off nature or for funding which has ceased, come off the budget for that particular output.

Mr WOOD: One last question. Minister, I wrote to you some time ago about the pre-release programs for prisoners, especially in relation to prisoners that were on a life sentence. The problem I was trying to highlight was that, because a prisoner on a life sentence does not know whether they will be given a 20- or a 25-year non-parole period, basically until the last minute, it is very difficult to set up pre-release programs for that prisoner because they do not know exactly when they could possibly be released.

Dr TOYNE: That will not apply to new prisoners coming in convicted of murder; the non-parole period is set at the time of sentencing nowadays. For most prisoners in gaol, the guidelines that we have put in place define whether they are 20 or 25 years - whether there is a multiple killing or a single killing and other aggravated factors that might lead to a longer non-parole period. Most prisoners will have a fair idea of what their situation is. There are a small number of prisoners that the Director of Public Prosecutions has taken, or will take, into court to have the court set a non-parole period where there is some doubt about the level of culpability, or whether culpability may be argued to be above the 25-year level. We are trying to sort out the circumstances of that small number of prisoners as it can be done.

At the moment, as you point out, that is not done under the current provisions in the act at the 19-year mark, and the DPP can then finalise the arrangements. However, for the vast majority of prisoners, they would not have any doubt about when they can first apply for parole. I will get Jens to talk about how that is dealt with operationally in preparing prisoners for potential parole release.

Mr TOLSTRUP: Lifers who are up for release will have a special group in the prison looking at lifers and how to get them out. We have a special watch on them, you might say, and a special planning for them.

Mr WOOD: The problem I have is that there are some prisoners there who really do not know what classification they are going to be; whether they are going to be 20 or 25 years, or basically longer term. Until they know what they are going to be classified as, they do not know what is happening. I believe the previous Director of Public Prosecutions raised that issue. The other important issue is that it is very difficult to have pre-release programs for a prisoner who does not know when his parole assessment will come up, at least. I am not saying these people should not be punished, but from the point of a natural justice, they should at least be entitled to know what period of time they are going to have on them.

Dr TOYNE: Member for Nelson, as I have said, it is a very small residual number of prisoners who have not been dealt with either through the courts already, or would have any doubt about their circumstance. I know the outgoing Director of Public Prosecutions drew attention to this issue as well. I will have a look at it. We will just see what it looks like.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to that particular output? That being the case, that concludes consideration for output 3.1, Custodial Services.

Output 3.2 - Community Corrections

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 3.2, Community Corrections. Are there are questions?

Ms CARNEY: In the interests of time, Mr Chairman, no.

Mr WOOD: Just some questions here for the minister on behalf of the member for Brailling. What is the budget for community work gangs? How many gangs are in Darwin and Alice Springs? I will go through these things slowly just because I think you can give one answer. How many prisoners are involved in those work programs?

Dr TOYNE: Just a general rundown on community work gangs?

Mr WOOD: General rundown including what sort of projects they have been involved in, and whether you still do pensioner yard cleanups?

Mr TOLSTRUP: There are three work gangs or work parties in Alice Springs and three in Darwin. The budget for them for this financial year we are in would be \$377 722 in Alice Springs, and \$463 000 in Darwin. This funding includes the operational costs, the management of the work party, vehicles, equipment, and other prisoner on-costs. The main bulk of it would be the prison officers going with the work parties.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is there room to expand the community work gangs from two points of view: (1) are there enough suitable prisoners that could work on these gangs, and (2) would the government give enough funding so that these work gangs could be expanded?

Dr TOYNE: I have indicated our general intent is to go in the direction where the community work gangs are a good example in opening benefit to the community and rehabilitation prospects for the prisoners. In the number of suitable prisoners, I will ask Jens to talk about that.

Mr TOLSTRUP: There are certainly a number of prisoners who would be suitable for the work parties because, all in all for instance, in Darwin prison we would have around 150 on the low security rating. Out of those, it should be easy to find more. The question is, of course, to find the resources to do it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mr MILLS: I have one question. Minister, are you aware that, in procedures involving local members utilising the services of the work gangs, there was a briefing organised that only involved government members and excluded opposition and Independent members? New procedures were put in place at that point as a result of that meeting and Independent and opposition members only found out by default.

Dr TOYNE: I take this opportunity to put on the public record that I would want to see no fear or favour in contacts between the members of the Legislative Assembly and this program. That is my own stated policy. I would be very concerned if there was any deviation from that policy.

Mr MILLS: I just report to you it has been corrected, but it was an offence to find that it had occurred.

Dr TOYNE: I share your offence. It is clearly something that should be equitable between all local members in representing their electorates.

Ms CARNEY: So, it will not happen again minister?

Dr TOYNE: It will not happen again on my watch

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regards to that particular output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 3.2, Community Corrections.

Output 3.3 - Juvenile Detention

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will proceed with Output 3.3, Juvenile Detention. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: Minister, recently there was some juveniles who escaped from Don Dale. Could you give the reasons – not the reason.

Dr TOYNE: They are good diggers, that is one reason.

Mr WOOD: Could you explain how they breached security and have those security failures been attended to?

Mr TOLSTRUP: There was a security breach, so to speak, in respect that the fence was not up to the standard that it needed to be. We are just in the process of actually having the fence built to that standard which will make that sort of escape impossible.

Mr WOOD: Is this the fence for the newly upgraded area or the old fence?

Mr TOLSTRUP: It is for the newly upgraded area.

Mr WOOD: Can I ask who checked the fences after the contract was finished to make sure they were up to the standard you would have expected for a security area?

Mr TOLSTRUP: I could not answer that question, as to who inspected it. Anyway, we took it away from the building authorities.

Mr WOOD: Right. I might ask the minister for Planning and Lands.

Dr TOYNE: Feel free.

Mr WOOD: My favourite area is Wildman River. I have a couple of questions. What is happening to it at the present time? Is it true, as I have been told by some people, at the present time it is being used as a weekender?

Dr TOYNE: I do not know about the second part, but I can tell you that from the official point of government, it is in mothballs at present while we examine and make decisions on the alternatives to prison proposals or options that have been brought to us at the moment. However, I am not aware of any weekender allegations.

Mr WOOD: Minister, when asking the same question about Wildman River you have said for along time that it is in mothballs. It must smell like Naphthalene by now. Considering that your documents say that our gaols are at 100% capacity - that was from last year and this year - why could it not be use as a low security prison if it cannot be used for juveniles anymore?

Dr TOYNE: We did look at that, but it is a question of what model we want to follow. The model we are seriously looking at is the model where out-of-gaol alternatives are strongly connected to community benefit and to economic benefit to regional development in the Northern Territory. We do not believe that an isolated facility such as Wildman River would best suit that model. We think that we need to have the ability to interact the programs more strongly with local economic activity and local community activities. That is the main policy issue at the moment, and that will be determined, I guess finally, when Cabinet make their choices.

Mr WOOD: You would not think minister, that Wildman River, as an area where there is cattle production, especially live cattle, a lot of tourism and, as some of the juveniles used to do before, there was work with Parks and Wildlife, especially in helping maintain the barrages there, that there would not be some economic benefits of opening up that prison?

Dr TOYNE: Wildman River, like any other site around the Territory, would offer some things and not others. It will be assessed against other alternatives when Cabinet examine the options available to us. All I can say is that it is in abeyance at the moment until decisions are made about the alternatives. Those decisions may or may not involve Wildman River.

Mr WOOD: Just a question from the member for Braitling. Minister ...

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, may I just interrupt for a second? I understand that core members have priority over local members. While the member for Nelson, being a core member, is asking the minister questions himself, that is fine - core members should have the right to ask questions before local members. Do you think they should do that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, I am comfortable with it. The member for Nelson has the call, he is rolling through, he has prefixed it saying that the member for Braitling gave him that question. Member for Greatorex, I believe that you may be getting questions from other sources, and we do not ask you to say where they are from. Please continue, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. I could have asked these questions as if they were my own, but I thought for the sake of being accused of plagiarism, I would identify the source. Is the government still funding juvenile diversionary programs? Oh, I know what she is saying now: is the Commonwealth still funding juvenile diversionary programs? Is that in the budget? What is the NT contribution?

Dr TOYNE: I am trying to get the information for you. Yes, I can certainly say that the Commonwealth has withdrawn its support, and we have had to pick up the funding for it. However, it is not under my portfolio; you will need to ask Paul Henderson as the Police minister, when he comes on.

I can answer the first part of your question because of my involvement in Cabinet; that the Commonwealth, to their lasting shame, has removed funding from this very valuable program, and just tossed the ball to us and said: 'It is your responsibility'. It is something that Mal Brough might want to take on board.

Mr WOOD: Following on from that, Mr Chairman. Does that mean if I need to find out the success rate of the juvenile diversionary program ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, Police.

Mr WOOD: My last question. In the annual report it talked about a \$50 000 grant to Mission Australia for a pilot project called Community Safety Through Family Participation which, I think, related to the release of people from the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre. Can you explain what that pilot program was about? Has it been completed? Have you any recommendations from that project?

Dr TOYNE: We will have to get back to you on that one. We do not have the person here who could answer that.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You would like to take that question on notice, minister?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I will do that.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, for the purposes of Hansard would you please restate your question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you explain what the \$50 000 grant to Mission Australia was used for under the heading Community Safety Through Family Participation Pilot Project?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you take that question on notice, minister?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I will.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard, I will allocate that question No 4.7. Please continue, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I am finished, thank you.

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

Dr LIM: Yes, thank you. Minister, I understand that Aranda House is now functioning again. Can you describe the program that is there, and what funding you provided for Aranda House?

Dr TOYNE: There are two halves to Aranda House. We have the short-term juvenile holding facility there. That has functioned continuously throughout the period in which the other part of the facility had been unused. I presume you were referring to the other part of Aranda House in your question. You would need to ask Delia Lawrie during her session as to what the details of that use are.

Dr LIM: You do not talk to each other? You do not have any cross-responsibilities for the ...

Dr TOYNE: It is a question of asking the minister who is responsible for that part of the budget and government activity the detail of what is going on there.

Dr LIM: Who funds the operation of the building?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry?

Dr LIM: Who funds the operation of the building?

Dr TOYNE: That is through Delia Lawrie's agency, so I suggest you quiz her about it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, any further questions?

Dr LIM: No, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Members of the committee, do you have any further questions in regard to Juvenile Detention? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0, Correctional Services.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – COMMUNITY SERVICES

Output 4.1 – Registrar-General

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output Group 4.0, Community Services, Output 4.1, Registrar-General. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of 4.1, Registrar- General.

Output 4.2 – Office of Public Trustee

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.2, Office of Public Trustee. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2, Office of Public Trustee.

Output 4.3 – Anti-Discrimination Commission

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.3, Anti-Discrimination Commission. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, in the interests of time I will not ask any, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No, because I do not have any.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 4.3, Anti-Discrimination Commission.

Output 4.4 – Information Commissioner

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.4, Information Commissioner. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: There are lots of questions about the Information Commissioner; however, in the interests of time I will ask only one or two. Attorney-General, are you aware that, since the last Estimates Committee hearing, it has taken the opposition the better part of eight or nine months to obtain information from the Information Commissioner? It has cost a fortune and most of what we have received has been blacked out. We are now in the position of needing to appeal so that there is some sliver of hope that we will get the information that you and your colleagues promised would be available to Territorians prior to the

last election. Are you aware of the lack of information provided under your portfolio and, indeed any others, to the opposition? Does that concern you?

Dr TOYNE: I am aware of a lot of things about the case that you are talking about, which is where you applied to the government on one of the greatest whaling expeditions, I believe, in terms of Freedom of Information acts around the country.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, one of the greatest?

Dr TOYNE: Whaling expeditions - you were trying to catch the big one, all right. You applied for 3500 documents.

Ms CARNEY: Three thousand five hundred documents, minister, across the entire Northern Territory government is not much.

Dr TOYNE: I am sorry, but it is ...

Ms CARNEY: How many do you have with you? A couple of thousand this morning?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, could you let the minister answer your question?

Dr TOYNE: I can certainly point out that the time taken to process an application starts at the point where the applicant pays for it, and that point occurred several months after the original application was lodged in your case. On several occasions, as part of the process, the department came back to your advisors and said that they would need more time, simply because of the very wide application that you had submitted. I suggest that, while we will offer full access to the process to you, as to anyone else, perhaps a more targeted approach might give a quicker response from the department.

You will appreciate that there are several interests being balanced in the release of information, and that it is very important for the department to follow the protocols that are set up under the legislation. If you are going to present a very large body of requests, as you did, they still have to follow, to the letter, the protocols for each of the elements of that request. I can only say that you will get your information according to the detail that is laid out in the act. Maybe a different approach might get a more satisfactory result for you.

Ms CARNEY: Your suggestion that we adopt a more targeted approach, with respect, borders on being offensive because the inference is that the opposition only seeks information that government wants to release. It is our right, and that of any other Territorian, to seek information that they were promised by the Australian Labor Party prior to 2001. I make that point. How many individuals ...

Dr TOYNE: I make the point back that we are talking here about the details of the process that the legislation actually calls for, for any application. I simply point out that out of the 1000 Territorians who have now made application under this legislation, you seem to be the only one having all these difficulties.

Ms CARNEY: Funny that, is not it?

Dr TOYNE: It is to do with what you already know of the process. You can read it in the act as to what steps have to be taken by the department and the commissioner to fulfil the requirements of the act. I am asserting that you probably built the problem by the nature of the way you applied for the information. I am not in any way denying you the right to apply for it, as much as you like. However, the process will dictate a time frame to get through this, simply because of the amount of material that is involved.

Ms CARNEY: Attorney-General, there is another possibility, is there not, that out of the 1000 Territorians who have sought information and received it, the opposition seems to be standing all by itself in its inability to obtain information from your government? Might the contrary view be that the opposition is being actively obstructed?

Dr TOYNE: I do not think so.

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Dr TOYNE: I do not know, simply because, quite properly, I am not involved in the detail of this application. I can only say that the exact same protocols have been applied to your application as everyone

else; there is no deviation whatsoever from the standard practices. I believe that you are getting the same response, the only difference being the sheer scale of what you applied for.

Ms CARNEY: Attorney-General, at the last Estimate's Committee hearing, you and some your colleagues were, politely speaking, less than forthcoming in answering a number of important questions relating to this budget, which is contrary to government spin about how effective the estimates process is. In a ...

Dr TOYNE: That is your assertion. I am not accepting that.

Ms CARNEY: In a budget that is close to \$3bn, the opposition's request is for information that you and your colleagues refused to provide in the first instance. The information sought of about 3500 pages is more than reasonable. I simply make the point that it is no coincidence, in our view, that the opposition is being, or seems to be, obstructed from this information. I asked you whether that concerns you and you said no. I guess that is all we need.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have to give the minister a chance to respond.

Ms CARNEY: Well, the point was earlier ...

Dr TOYNE: I will just simply reiterate that your application is being handled exactly the same way as any other application according to the act. The difficulties, I assert, are due to the sheer volume of the material that you have applied for. Simply, the process repeated 3500 times is going to take considerable time to work through. I totally reject your assertion that we are not forthcoming in these Estimates Committee hearings. I have been giving you information for over two hours now, to the best of my ability and that of my agency. If you are not happy with the information you are getting, then it is up to you to ask the right questions.

Ms CARNEY: There is not a lot of point in making another freedom of information application is there? Thanks, Mr Chairman, there are some other questions but I will not ask them in the interests of time.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do any other members have any questions in regard to this output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 4.4, Information Commissioner.

Output 4.5 – Consumer and Business Affairs

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.5, Consumer and Business Affairs. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, firstly, should questions related to the implementation of the construction contracts, the security of payments legislation, be directed to you?

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Okay, correct. Minister, you would be aware that the object of that act was to provide adjudication of a payment dispute to determine the dispute fairly, rapidly, informally and as inexpensively as possible. Correct?

Dr TOYNE: That is the objective, yes.

Mr MILLS: Minister, are you aware that the very first business to use this legislation found it unfair, slow and very expensive and, worse than that, even protected a builder who had ripped off his contractors?

Dr TOYNE: Well, you are asserting that, but you would want to substantiate that before I deal with it.

Mr MILLS: I understand that you have been contacted by the first contractor to make use of this legislation.

Dr TOYNE: Yes. We have had a letter from that particular firm and we are now working with the agency to get a response and deal with the issues that have been put forward.

Mr MILLS: Is it your responsibility, minister, to ensure that this legislation does what it says it will do?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, absolutely. The way that I do that, or need to do that, is through an interim process with people who are actually using the structure. If there are problems it is my responsibility to take them up, and I certainly intend to.

Mr MILLS: Would you not expect, minister, that if the legislation is put in place and, obviously, advertised and promoted throughout the construction industry in this case, upon the promotion of this new initiative, the machinery and the apparatus would already be in place?

Dr TOYNE: In this case, the act requires adjudicators and they would have to have a level of training to carry out their function. My understanding is that the adjudicator training has now been completed. There was a training course which most recently ran on 1 and 2 June to produce home grown adjudicators to look into these matters. We recently introduced the lower tier process through the Community Justice Centre. We are now set up with trained people who can offer the adjudication. It is now a matter of dealing with the context in which the process is applied. If there are problems arising from experiences people are getting from that, then we will deal with it.

Mr MILLS: You have just reinforced the point, though, that it appears that you do not have to have the apparatus in place when you make the announcements. You do not have to actually deliver; all you need to do is create the impression that there is something wonderful out there. In fact, the machinery was not in place, because you have just said that it was only in the last month or so that you trained adjudicators.

Dr TOYNE: Home grown adjudicators. We have been using interstate adjudicators, particularly from Western Australia, so there have been adjudicators available to carry the process.

Mr MILLS: Are you aware, minister, that the use of interstate adjudicators was largely as a result of the endeavours of the contractor to try to find a solution to the problem that they thought you had solved?

Dr TOYNE: The act, as I recall it, has or gives the ability to people seeking this sort of mediation to identify and put forward an adjudicator. That is well within the terms of the scheme as we legislated.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, I am hazarding a guess, but would you be able to speak closer to the mike as you respond?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, sure, sorry.

Mr MILLS: Minister, this appears to be form with your government; that the capacity to put your energies into promoting something to create an impression in the wider community serves a political end. However, you have failed to actually deliver, in this case, for the very first business operator to make use of this apparatus - and it has cost them dearly. Are you aware of the additional and compounded cost and inconvenience to a small business operator who walked in, in good faith?

Dr TOYNE: It is fair to say that the only reason we are sitting here talking about the implementation issues of this particular scheme is that the Labor government actually brought a scheme in after decades of people having to seek court remedies from this or getting no remedy at all. I will certainly put my hand up and say, yes, as minister, we will work through any issues that are brought to us as people experience either good or bad outcomes from this structure. I certainly am not out there window dressing a bogus initiative from government. In fact, I spend an awful lot of time in my working hours making sure that the detail is right on initiatives that I am responsible for - and have for many years.

Mr MILLS: This, like a number of initiatives, minister, illustrates that - notwithstanding I know that you are a genuine and sincere man and would like this not to be the case - the fact is more effort was put into the creation of an impression than on actually delivering to the benefit of small business operators.

Dr TOYNE: That is your assertion, and you are basing that on one case that you have put forward. Now ...

Mr MILLS: Sadly, it is the first one to make use of it.

Dr TOYNE: If there is a more general dysfunction, then we need to look at how the scheme is structured, and we will do that. I have said all the way through my history of legislating in the parliament that we will always monitor and revisit schemes if there are unforeseen problems occurring with them. Equally, I have said that you do not rush back to legislation on the basis of one case. If something has gone wrong, let us look at the detail of it and try to fix it within the scope of the current legislation and

operational arrangements. If there is something more deep-seated in the way the scheme is structured, then we will have another look. I will deal in detail with the issue that has been brought to me. My understanding is, from the brief that I just received, is that I will see that back from the agency in the near future. If there are things to be fixed, we will fix them.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister. You will appreciate that, whilst this is the first contractor to make use of this legislation, it is not the view of opposition that there is something at fault with the legislation. It is like a marketing exercise to sell a vehicle that creates an impression, but it does not contain an engine. This does not actually have the essential ingredients to deliver. For the first business operator to make use of this system after 12 months will be talking to many other business operators. It may well be that you have a situation that is very difficult because once bitten, twice shy. It runs the system all the way through the small business sector; they know that this legislation was strong on marketing but weak on delivery.

Dr TOYNE: Well, I think the ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I just hold it there for one moment. In all of that, I did not detect one question.

Mr MILLS: Okay. A question then, Mr Chairman. Minister, are you prepared to contribute to the high costs incurred by this small business operator as the first one to use this legislation?

Dr TOYNE: I will look at the details of the case and we will see what is right or wrong with the outcomes, and act accordingly. I am not going to give that assertion or undertaking here, because I do not yet know my agency's advice on it. I can certainly assure other small business operators and people who are in these situations that there is an engine. I encourage them to continue to harness the scheme to their needs.

Mr MILLS: With respect, minister, over 12 months have passed, and you have just referred to advertisements being in place now - 12 months later - to recruit adjudicators.

Dr TOYNE: It is there, it is for use, and I encourage our businesses to use it. I will certainly be monitoring the detail of the way cases are turning out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 4.5, Consumer and Business Affairs.

Output 4.6 – Office of Crime Prevention

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 4.6, Office of Crime Prevention. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Attorney-General, I want to ask you some questions in relation to the crime statistics. I note that Mr Stephen Jackson is coming to the table. On the latest crime statistics - I have edition 14, I am sure all of them are the same, give or take a page reference here or there. However, in edition 14, the latest one, I think, on page 2 it says - and I just want to read the two parts of these crime statistics, a very short sentence, to you, and then ask a question in relation to it. It says: 'The following ...', which is the contents of the crime statistics, '... is a summary of the findings relating to key offence groups recorded by the police for the Northern Territory as a whole and major urban centres'. Yes? Then, on page 94 of this edition, it says, under the heading Selected Regional Centres: 'Six major urban centres are reported on in this report'. It then lists Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy. My question is: are crime figures collected in remote areas of the Northern Territory? If so, where can they be found in this document?

Dr TOYNE: I will get Stephen Jackson, because he actually compiles these reports and he can give a more accurate answer.

Mr JACKSON: Stephen Jackson of the Office of Crime Prevention. The figures that you are referring to for what we term 'the balance' are not, in fact, published in this document. The figures for the Territory as a whole are that - for the Territory as a whole, yes. The six urban centres are discrete centres within the overall Territory. If you were to do the arithmetic and take the urban centres out from the Territory, you would have the statistics for the remaining areas.

Ms CARNEY: Are you saying, Mr Jackson, that all of the figures in relation to, let us say, crimes of violence from places like Port Keats and other areas, are contained in here?

Mr JACKSON: Absolutely, yes. They are in the figure for the whole of the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. In light of the recent national debate, which has forced one Labor member to write a memo in relation to the Chief Minister and her poor handling of the portfolio, do you think it would assist the people of the Northern Territory for those figures in areas other than the areas referred to on page 94, to be published in this document?

Dr TOYNE: That is an issue that is my call. I am open to that possibility. It simply means, as Stephen said, disaggregating figures that are already in the whole-of-Territory figures and publishing them as a separate page called non-urban or whatever. I believe that would be a useful addition to the series.

Ms CARNEY: I am delighted to hear you say that. This is going to be represented, be it an indicator of crime in all of the areas in the Northern Territory, so you may as well put in all of the areas in the Northern Territory, give or take. However, more importantly, I believe, if government of any political persuasion is serious about tackling crimes of violence, for instance, then surely those figures need to be specifically referred to and included in these sort of documents so that not only governments, but other non-government organisations and other citizens can track whether, in fact, improvements have been made?

Dr TOYNE: I can only say that Territorians are very lucky to have a Labor government which is the only one in the country that puts out such an extensive series. We are indicating that we may extend the series further.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I do not know that I can necessarily agree with the first part of your proposition. However, I do welcome the fact that you, Attorney-General, would see fit to outline in further detail the crimes that occur in other communities. With that answer, there is no point me asking some other questions in that output area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes the consideration of all output groups.

Non Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other Non Output Specific Budget-related Questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Attorney-General, could you please provide details of the numbers of people who are in the media unit within the Department of Justice?

Dr TOYNE: I refer that to my CEO.

Mr SHANAHAN: The figures I have here are for the corporate communications area, in which we have four officers.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, corporate communications?

Mr SHANAHAN: That involves not only media, but whole of departmental communications.

Ms CARNEY: Right. I will come back to that. So, there are four people. What are their levels?

Mr SHANAHAN: There is one EO1, one AO8, one AO7 and one AO4.

Ms CARNEY: What is the nature of the communications to which you refer?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, what is the?

Ms CARNEY: I think we are having a direct discussion where we are not meant to be having a direct discussion.

Mr SHANAHAN: Just about anything which we get involved in which has a requirement to communicate, either internally or externally, they will get involved, and provide advice for us. There are some areas which do a bit of their own, but most of it comes through that area.

Ms CARNEY: Does the unit – I can call it a unit?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Does the unit publish materials? If so, what is the nature of the materials they publish?

Mr SHANAHAN: It does not publish its own material. It assists various operational units to publish material that they put out.

Ms CARNEY: When you say 'assists various operational units', what does that mean?

Mr SHANAHAN: Like Consumer Affairs, or you might have a unit running campaigns ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry?

Dr TOYNE: Like our little black book on frauds would be ...

Ms CARNEY: On fords?

Dr TOYNE: Frauds.

Ms CARNEY: Oh right. I am sorry.

Dr TOYNE: Not frogs. There are regular publications. Consumer Affairs is an active area.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So the communications unit will do the design, the layout, for those sorts of publications? Yes?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes, they do. It is a team-type thing. They help out, and they advise on technical issues and the like.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so does the communications unit extend its tentacles to the four output groups on this that we are looking at for the estimates process? For instance, you know the Solicitor for the Northern Territory, the courts, Correctional Services? Okay. They are pretty much everywhere.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Was that a yes?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: They would be having trouble recording that.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Does anyone in the communications unit transcribe interviews of politicians?

Dr TOYNE: No.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, they are all done in the other communication unit which is in the Chief Minister's office?

Mr SHANAHAN: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Time is against me. What about reviews? How many reviews are being undertaken currently in the Department of Justice, Attorney-General?

Dr TOYNE: Not many ...

Ms CARNEY: I guess, specifically, how many are there, and what are they?

Dr TOYNE: Yes. I want to initially say that we would want to distinguish between what I think you are calling - what are really paid consultancy-type reviews - and the normal internal review processes that go on within the department. You are talking about the paid consultancy type?

Ms CARNEY: Well, do you have both? That would ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, absolutely. As part of our management within the agency we are constantly reviewing ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I meant do you have the answers for both?

Dr TOYNE: There is not an answer, really, to the internal ones in that they are not discrete events; they are, basically, just part of the management practices within the agency. The second one, we have some. This is all consultants. The review - do you want to respond to this?

Ms CARNEY: Could I interrupt? Attorney-General, are you happy to table that document? Then I can lead to my final two questions.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I am happy to table it but Mr Shanahan can add some explanation around it.

Mr SHANAHAN: What this document provides is details of all the external consultancies which we have let that are over \$10 000, and it provides it in detail. Of those, there is one which can be termed a review which involved a look at our rosters at the correctional centres in Darwin and Alice Springs to determine how we could comply with the requirements of the determination for prison officers which had a provision which required that at least every second weekend to be taken off. We had some shift work experts to have a look at our rosters and make some recommendations. You will see that in Shift Work Solutions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you tabling that document?

Mr SHANAHAN: Tabling it.

Ms CARNEY: If you have this in table form, which I assume you do, would you be good enough to table that also? Could you please provide details of the number of staff employed in the Department of Justice detailing at what levels they are employed, and also include a breakdown of whether they are full-time or part-time employees?

Mr DREIER: We do not have that amount of detail, Ms Carney, but we can certainly get it for you.

Ms CARNEY: Looks like it will be a question on notice. I thought this was a regular every year question?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you prepared to take that question on notice?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I am.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, would you please restate that question for the purposes of Hansard.

Ms CARNEY: Could you provide details of the number of staff employed by the agency including the levels at which they are employed, and also include a breakdown of the number of full-time and part-time employees.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you accept that question on notice minister?

Dr TOYNE: Yes I do.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of Hansard I will allocate that question No 4.8.

Dr TOYNE: Could we just get some clarification?

Mr SHANAHAN: Sorry, could we just clarify a couple of things. Are we talking about full-time equivalents or numbers or people?

Ms CARNEY: Sorry. Full-time equivalents which we should have as a matter of course, but also there are part-time employees. We would like to know how many.

Mr SHANAHAN: They are worked out as full-time equivalents anyway. That is one of the problems of full-time equivalents. I know what you mean though, yes. I am sorry the second part of that; are we saying just at the cut-off date of 31 May 2006?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, 31 May 2006, that is what the other agencies have done. That seems to be the norm.

Dr TOYNE: A snapshot of that particular pay period.

Ms CARNEY: Of the last – yes, okay, as at 31 May 2006.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are we satisfied that everyone understands what the question on notice is and the information required?

Ms CARNEY: I am satisfied. I find my job very satisfying.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Wonderful. Are there any other questions in regard to non output specific budget related questions?

Ms CARNEY: Attorney-General, you have had an acting CEO for the better part of six or seven months. What has been the delay in appointing a CEO? I will ask that question first.

Dr TOYNE: We have gone out for expressions of interest. There has been a panel to examine the applicants from that round, and it is still work in progress. In the meantime, can I just say what a great job Greg Shanahan is doing as acting CEO. The agency is operating normally. We hope to get it resolved as quickly as possible because the panel has to be assured of a recommendation to the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Attorney-General, you have talked in the past about the so-called independence of the DPP after your government put it under the umbrella of the Department of Justice. Does it concern you that the former CEO of Justice has been not only undertaking in the last six months his new role as DPP, but has also been spending, I am advised, a great deal of his time in the Department of Justice? Is that a conflict of interest?

Dr TOYNE: I have no idea because I ...

Ms CARNEY: Does it concern you that the ...

Dr TOYNE: I presume that the DPP would have to go to the Department of Justice for many things. It is not unusual ...

Ms CARNEY: Not to help the Acting CEO do his job, though, you would not have thought?

Dr TOYNE: I will give the Acting CEO a chance to defend himself directly, because this is totally outrageous.

Ms CARNEY: Darwin is a very small town, Attorney-General.

Dr TOYNE: I will tell you that the independence of the DPP - the thing they should be independent on - is innuendo and unsubstantiated ...

Ms CARNEY: Darwin is a very small town. If you do not know that the DPP ...

Dr TOYNE: I just think that ...

Ms CARNEY: ... has been, I am told, doing someone else's job in addition to the \$300 000 he is getting paid for the DPP, you are not doing your job properly ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, can you please let the minister respond.

Dr TOYNE: Your behaviour is disgraceful in this action. I honestly believe that you are impugning a very fine person who is operating totally professionally.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, Attorney-General. No more questions, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The Acting CEO can respond if he likes.

Mr SHANAHAN: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are justified.

Mr SHANAHAN: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right.

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I would like to indicate to you that we have swapped.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Brainting. Have you any questions on this?

Mrs BRAHAM: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officers from the Department of Justice for attending.

Dr TOYNE: We have some more answers to questions on notice back. The Larrakia Part A is \$4.3m, Lake Bennett is \$4.4m, and the grant to Mission Australia of \$50 000, for the member for Nelson, is \$4.7m. They are back in time. We will still work on the number of lawyers.

Ms CARNEY: Always work on the number of lawyers.

Mr CHAIRMAN: As I was saying, on behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officers from the Department of Justice for attending today.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to Health and Community Services.

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 Community Services.

Dr TOYNE: I introduce Robert Griew, and will introduce others as we pass to their outputs. In February, with the Minister for Family and Community Services, I launched Building Healthier Communities, which is our five-year plan for Health and Community Services. We are now halfway through that initial time period and we believe that we have had considerable achievements towards the priorities in that framework. These achievements are built on a platform of consistently higher resourcing for the health system by the government. All of these successes have also been achieved in a climate of strong financial management and control.

The Department of Health and Community Services' output budget increased in 2005-06 from \$686.6m to \$740.7m, an increase of \$54m or 7.87%. The increase of \$54m is made up of: \$29m received from the Australian government for program funds; acquittal of \$2.6m of Australian government programs related to revenue recorded in the 2004-05 financial year; \$2.4m in additional NT funds to meet added cost of nurses' EBA parity increase of 5.34% paid in February 2005; \$5.4m for Cabinet approved additional funding to meet specific program increases; \$13.2m received for services provided to other jurisdictions for hospitalisation of their residents; claims under insurance policies and other fees and services; and \$1.4m transfer of funding and functions from other NT government departments.

The department's estimated end of financial year position is that it will exceed its published budget capacity figure by an estimated \$2m to \$3m. This will result in an increased accrual deficit of \$17.3m instead of the \$14.3m as estimated in Budget Paper No 3. The main cause of the increased expense is

legal costs and workers compensation payments. These settlement costs cannot be completely anticipated in the budget cycle and, where necessary, supplementation is sought at the end of the financial year.

The department operates 365 days a year, responding to unpredictable service demands to deliver high quality health services. On average, the department spends \$2m a day delivering these services. To operate to within an equivalent of a couple of days expenditure is strong endorsement of the balance that has been struck between client, clinical and financial responsibility. This is also within the context where the department has had to absorb additional costs in delivering expensive emergency relief and services after the Katherine floods, Cyclone Monica and the East Timor evacuation.

Output budgets for 2006-07 are expected to increase from \$740.7m to \$788.6m, an increase of \$47.9m or 6.5%. While NT revenue has increased by \$55m, this is offset by an overall reduction in Australian government revenue and revenue from other external sources. Some outputs with high level of Australian government funded programs appear to have a reduction in funding. These arrangements will be renegotiated with the Australian government over the course of 2006-07.

I now explain some other changes affecting all outputs across the whole of the Department of Health and Community Services. The health system continues to be faced with increasing demand for health services. In all output groups, there has been some reallocation and restructuring of resources to meet these cost pressures. These have been minor internal adjustments that have been required to meet the demands of services throughout the year.

Within each budget there is a substantial element of increased NT funding for 2006-07 to cover increases due to the flow-on effects of CPI and EBA impacts. In addition to the normal inflationary increases, in 2006-07 this government will provide the department with an additional \$20m to meet the increase in demand for its services. \$14.1m of this funding boost will go directly to the Territory's hospitals.

There are some areas in that to which I would like to draw the committee's attention: Acute Care Services' output budget of 2006-07 includes additional funding of \$16.4m for improved capacity to meet service demands across the full acute care sector, including \$7.8m for a Rapid Assessment and Planning Unit at the Royal Darwin Hospital; \$2m for program expansion such as with ambulance services, and new initiatives such as the universal neonatal hearing and screening program and additional beds at RDH; \$3m for a national trauma centre through additional Australian government funding; \$2.9m for the nurses' EBA 5.34% parity adjustment; \$18.7m for factors built into the budget such as wages and CPI adjustments and the matching requirements of Australian Health Care Agreements.

Each year, reporting measures for each program is enhanced to promote accountability. Nine performance measures have been added to the Acute Services output group with the weighted inlier equivalent separations, or WIES, and non-acute bed day measures discontinued. WIES has not been actively used for resource allocation for some years and it has been replaced with measures to describe throughput and complexity of the care; that is, same day, overnight, and weighted separations. This allows comparisons nationally and forms the basis for costings in numerous funding agreements with the Australian government. Other new performance measures relate to dialysis and patient travel, both in the Territory and interstate.

Turning to Community Health Services output, additional funding has been provided: \$0.9m for fee for services such as Medicare revenue; and \$4.3m for factors built into the budget such as CPI adjustments and EBA flow-on adjustments, including nurses parity adjustment. Many of the Commonwealth grants to community health services finished in 2005-06 and have not yet been renewed or replaced with other grants. They are likely to continue, but they have not yet been formalised and we are unable to count them in the budget. Furthermore, the budget for 2005-06 has increased due to the carry forward of \$4m from the previous year. In comparing 2006-07 budget with 2005-06, this caused an apparent drop in resources.

The increase in funding of the Environmental Health Services' output of \$0.3m is made up of funding for CPI and wages adjustment, plus a new initiative funded for hand-washing program. This has been offset by reductions due to funding agreements from the Australian government finalising and reallocation of resources. The level of the Australian government funding also heavily influences the Disease Control Services' output which is a variation of negative-\$3.6m in 2006-07 compared to 2005-06. This amount includes an additional \$0.8m allocated to nurses' EBA parity adjustment; other cost increases which have been offset by reductions due to agreements with the Australian government terminating negative-\$1.8m; and a removal of programs carried forward from the previous year which is negative-\$1m.

The Health Research output group variation of \$0.2m covers indexation of grants to research organisations such as Menzies School of Health Research and Cognitive Research Centre.

Mr Chairman, I am happy to take questions from the committee relating to my responsibilities under the budget.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions in regard to the statement?

Dr LIM: You drown me with information, minister, and you do that very well. Obviously, this is my first time as a shadow Health minister interrogating the budget, so bear with me if I am not quite good at this.

Minister, you commented about the large increases in budget allocations for the Health portfolio. I wonder why there continues to be large waiting lists, both in the elective surgery as well as Emergency Departments across the Territory, where hospitals are not functioning particularly well, such as the Tennant Creek Hospital. Could you explain why these things are happening as part of your large budgets?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, in regard to the shadow minister's observation, is that better dealt with under an output?

Dr TOYNE: I would say that they are just that; that you may assert that our hospitals are not functioning well, or other things about the health system. However, the simple answer to your question is that we have to put more money into health because there is more demand appearing day by day. The increase of presentations at our hospitals is enormous, and we are discovering, with the improved community health services, more morbidity day by day that requires tertiary treatment. That is really just a snapshot of the incredible neglect that we inherited when we inherited the health system, which was simply not picking up a lot of the morbidity or doing anything about it. That was an absolute tragedy for the Territory.

Dr LIM: We can debate that shortly.

Dr TOYNE: Well, you started it.

Dr LIM: Yes, we will debate that shortly. I will ask the questions to you in that regard. My assertion that our health system is not as good as it can be in spite of the large budget that you have, is that now it is consuming probably around – what? – 20% to 25% of the Territory budget, which is very significant. Can you explain why frontline health workers are required to work longer hours and double shifts? Why is that happening?

Dr TOYNE: I have already told you; it is demand. The need is there to provide the care to sick and injured Territorians, and it is increasing day by day. That is putting pressure on our health professionals wherever they work - whether it is in remote clinics, or community health centres, or in our hospitals. There is no question that we are meeting far more demand than the health system was meeting four or five years ago. That is as a result of the enormous increase in the capacity that we have put in place, right across the board.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, and shadow minister, I am having difficulty ...

Dr LIM: This is debating the minister's statement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Statement? All right, but I would be appreciative if we can get through this and then clearly identify when we are into output groups.

Dr LIM: I shall do that.

Dr TOYNE: I am happy to desist if he is. We can get on with the budget questions.

Dr LIM: Well, it is relating to the budget question. That is the point. In my assertion that health care is not as well provided as part of the increasing budget allocation, the minister's response was that it is because of demand. If that is the increased demand in the Northern Territory, minister, are you suggesting to me that your health care system is failing? That is why there are sicker people out there who are demanding more services out of health?

Dr TOYNE: I have already stated a number of the issues that we are facing in the health system. One is the onset of greater levels of chronic disease. There is also increasing presentations with people with

trauma in our hospitals. However, what is picking up all of that up in greater numbers is the success of our primary health care programs. We are out in the communities regularly now screening and assessing need. That is, amongst other things, bringing demand into our sites of care.

Dr LIM: Surely you contradict yourself, minister, when you say that there is more trauma, more chronic diseases. In other words, your primary health care and community care programs are not working, and that is why you are getting people coming into you with more chronic illnesses.

Dr TOYNE: No. Look what ...

Dr LIM: The fact that there is more trauma; what is happening out there to create the trauma for Territorians? There has to be an issue there about something failing somewhere. Have you exercised your mind, identified where the failings are to try and rectify the situation?

Dr TOYNE: I would be careful if I were you, talking about the roots of all these trends that we are now dealing with, because the roots of these trends go well back before I had carriage of these responsibilities - well back before this Labor government had carriage of these responsibilities.

Chronic disease, as you well know as a medically trained person, would have antecedence back 10, 20 years in some cases. We are harvesting the results of actions, or the situation that existed in our community 10 years ago. We are harvesting, in the case of trauma, social dysfunction that is not new, despite the current debates that are, I believe, ill-informed debates, that have been a long time in antecedent, to be appearing now. If you want to have a debate about this, I suggest that you have Question Time in parliament, ministerial statements regularly through parliament, and legislation. We can debate who is to blame for this, or what are the root causes for all this, but let us get on with the budget.

Dr LIM: The question is: when are you going to stop blaming people and look at your own five-year track record and the blowing out of your budgets?

Dr TOYNE: Let us get on with the budget, shall we?

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, coming to the first output group, which is ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Then you are finished?

Dr LIM: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else have any comments on the opening statement?

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, did you mention the refurbishment of the Alice Springs Hospital in your opening statement?

Dr TOYNE: No, I did not, but I am more than happy to take questions later ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Then we will come back to that later. Okay.

Dr TOYNE: ... to the point that we can answer them. I say up-front, Mr Chairman, that the actual refurbishment activities are the responsibility of Chris Burns, the minister for DPI. You can get those details from him. I can talk about the operational arrangements in the hospital while the refurbishments are going on.

Mrs BRAHAM: Did you mention the membership of the hospital board?

Dr TOYNE: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, you have not done that. Okay, we will get to it.

Dr TOYNE: Do you mean the review, or the ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, new members or ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we will get to that as we go through, yes. But I did not mention it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, we will wait until we get to it.

Dr LIM: Minister, if you can assist me here. I am looking at page 109 of the Budget Paper No 3, where you have total expenses for 2006-07 at \$788m-plus, and your output appropriations is \$542m-plus. I do not understand. Can you explain the difference between the total expenses and the output appropriation? What happens to the balance of the money that is not appropriated when you get that balance, which works out to be something in the order of \$246m? Where did this come from?

Dr TOYNE: I will pass that question to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Dr Lim is asking you about this question. If you feel appropriate to answer at this moment before we get into the outputs ...

Dr TOYNE: I will pass to Robert Griew to give the member an explanation.

Mr GRIEW: The difference between the total expenses in the table on page 109 and the output appropriation is the difference between the expenses budget and the Northern Territory output appropriation; that is, the money that is in the bills that are being explored in this committee. The rest comes from other sources of income.

Dr LIM: Can you point to what the other sources are, and how that makes up the shortfall of about \$246m?

Mr GRIEW: The largest single part of that ...

Dr TOYNE: They are all listed in the back of the budget papers, member for Greateorex, if you look at ...

Dr LIM: I am struggling to follow it, which is why I am asking for guidance.

Dr TOYNE: If you go to the back to the budget papers, there is Sales of Goods and Services where there is a list of the ...

Dr LIM: The back of the budget book?

Dr TOYNE: Page 294.

Mr GRIEW: If you go to page 122, the operating statement, which has the estimated outcome for 2005-06 and the budget for 2006-07, through the income items, you will see that they total \$726m in the first two years, and \$769m in the second. They list the sources of those incomes.

Dr TOYNE: Then they are itemised in the back of the budget books.

Dr LIM: Which still leaves you with a \$19m shortfall. That is where the deficit then comes from.

Mr GRIEW: This is an accrual budget ...

Dr LIM: I understand.

Mr GRIEW: There are non-cash expenses in the expenditure side of this budget, and it is practice in this jurisdiction, as in other jurisdictions, not to provide in the budget for the non-cash expenses, which include things like depreciation. Of course, the greater part of this estimated deficit you will find in all of the other departments as well.

Dr LIM: But depreciation and amortisation is recorded there as \$17m.

Mr GRIEW: It is recorded as an expense, but it is not provided for in the appropriation.

Dr LIM: It is not provided for?

Mr GRIEW: That is right. It is, in common with other jurisdictions, a non-cash expense, which is noted under accrual terms in the operating statement.

Dr LIM: Therefore, in other words, depreciation is not really factored into the budget of the department? It is a recorded figure but not factored in?

Mr GRIEW: It is factored in, but according to the accounting standards under accrual accounting.

Dr LIM: That is right, but in the operations of the department it is not really considered in terms of: 'We have to put \$17m aside this year for depreciation and amortisation of equipment'.

Mr GRIEW: That is the operating standards across the budget as for ...

Dr LIM: I understand that it is an accounting practices, but I am talking about the practicality of running the department.

Mr GRIEW: It does not affect our running of the department.

Dr LIM: Okay, good.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will leave that one there. He understands the clarifications he was after. Let us move on now.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – ACUTE SERVICES

Output 1.1 – Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Acute Services, Output 1.1, Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, I do have questions. Just to get clear in my head, when you talk about admitting patients from Category 1 to Category 5, Category 1 applies to the sickest patients and Category 5 the least sick patients? Am I right? I want to get it clear first.

Mr GRIEW: Are you referring to Emergency Department triage categories?

Dr LIM: No, in output group Admitted Patient Services, page 112, you have the timeliness, Category 1, Category 2. I suggest three, four and five are others.

Mr GRIEW: Those are elective surgery waiting times, and Category 1 are the sickest patients. The patient is assessed as requiring their elective surgery in that time frame.

Dr LIM: Do you have only two categories, or do we have one, two, three, four or five?

Mr GRIEW: There are three categories.

Dr LIM: What is Category 3 then?

Mr GRIEW: Up to 12 months non-urgent.

Dr LIM: Patients do not have to wait more than 12 months for surgery in this context, am I right?

Mr GRIEW: There are a number of ways of assessing a hospital's performance against these benchmarks, which are national benchmarks. We set a target for the proportion of patients we see within the target time frame for all three categories.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that some Category 3 patients could actually, in fact, be waiting for surgery longer than 12 months?

Mr GRIEW: I am sorry.

Dr LIM: What you are saying to me then is that there are some patients in Category 3 who could be waiting for well over 12 months for the elective surgery?

Mr GRIEW: The Category 3 is, to some extent, a more arbitrary time frame. However, for all three categories, we monitor the average waiting time and the proportion of people who are waiting longer than the targeted time frame.

Dr LIM: Minister, I wrote to you as far back as April seeking information such as elective surgery waiting times. How many people are currently waiting for elective surgery across the Territory, broken up into categories 1, 2 and 3?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that under that Output 1.1 or is that under Output 1.2?

Mr GRIEW: It is Output 1.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: But if they are not admitted, then they are not admitted.

Dr LIM: That is Admitted Services, that is what they are.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I thought the question was people waiting to go in.

Dr LIM: No, that is Acute Services, Admitted Patients.

Dr TOYNE: We have these figures here, so we will just get Robert to table them.

Dr LIM: Can you table them. It will be easy enough to have a look at them.

Mr GRIEW: The current elective surgery waiting list comprises 3277 patients, 312 in Category 1, 1206 in Category 2 and 759 in Category 3.

Dr LIM: Are you able to break them up into the various hospitals, particularly Alice Springs, Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine?

Mr GRIEW: I can break them up by hospital but not by hospital and category. If you want them by hospital and category we will have to take that on notice.

Dr LIM: It would be good to know what backlog of work there is in each of the hospitals.

Dr TOYNE: For Royal Darwin it is 3231 - this is the number actually done so it is not the waiting lists. The actual numbers of procedures done, which is the other side of the story: Darwin, 3231 which is a 200 increase from 2004-05; Alice Springs, 579 down from 859 in 2004-05; Katherine, 165 compared to 190 in 2004-05; Gove, 185 down from 263 in 2004-05; Tennant Creek, 17 down from 49. Overall, 3954 procedures performed in 2004-05, 3897 in 2005-06. The general pattern there is far more work in Darwin, less work in the other regional hospitals.

Mr GRIEW: I might add to the comment the minister made, that the data the minister provided that, in the annual state of our hospitals support that is put out nationally to compare performance across all other jurisdictions, the Northern Territory has, consistently over the last few years, been performing as the jurisdiction that performs the most elective surgery.

Dr LIM: In fact, we led the nation for a long time until recent years. I am glad to hear, minister, that you are now making some inroads into the waiting lists. That is a positive thing for the Territory. I recall in the old days that you often blamed the problems that, in fact, our theatres used to run elective lists as well as a separate theatre for emergency lists. Is that practice still going on, or has that been changed so that there are only one or two elective theatres that double up as emergency theatres as well?

Dr TOYNE: We were talking only yesterday about the Rapid Admission and Planning Unit which we are establishing in the Royal Darwin Hospital. One of the features of that is that there will be a theatre dedicated to the RAPU. The Head of General Surgery is of the opinion that that will have a positive impact on elective surgery waiting lists. We will be looking for a similar process or arrangement in Alice Springs to also try to relieve some of the current displacement of elective procedures by emergency procedures.

Dr LIM: Can you explain what the rapid response unit is supposed to do? Is it for Emergency Department patients, or are they for Category 1 patients? What is it for?

Dr TOYNE: What happens is ... I will refer that to Len Notaras.

Mr NOTARAS: Len Notaras, Department of Health and Community Services. The rapid assessment unit, as described yesterday at one of the official launches, will be dealing largely with those ill patients who come through the Emergency Department - Category 1, 2, 3; whatever those particular categories

are - ensuring they go very quickly to the operating room, have a quick turn around with a successful operation and, then, with the assistance of the facility such as the Hospital in the Homes and so on, have a shorter length of stay and, appropriately, are discharged back to their homes and communities.

Dr LIM: Thank you very much.

Mr GRIEW: Dr Lim, I have an answer in regard to the question you asked about emergency and elective surgery. It is our practice to have a dedicated 24-hour emergency theatre in Royal Darwin and the same arrangement in Alice Springs, albeit a different size, with the other theatres to take elective procedures. The issue is balancing the amount of the emergency work we have been having.

There is an initiative in this last budget in Alice Springs Hospital to separate out the area we have been using for overflow from the Emergency Department to another part of the hospital. It was intending to inhibit same-day procedures which is a large part of elective surgery and, as a result of that initiative, that will free up greater elective surgery activity in Alice Springs.

Dr LIM: All right. Obviously, in cancelling elective surgery, it poses a huge disruption to patients booked into elective surgery. The way it is done at a moment causes a lot of heartache for people.

Looking at some of your figures in the budget papers dating back a few years, and comparing them with your annual reports, particularly this annual report of 2004-05, the figures appear inconsistent. I do not know whether I can rely on the annual report or on the budget papers. Where, for instance, going to page 112 of Budget Paper No 3 of this year, and comparing that with page 75 of your annual report 2004-05, looking at ...

Dr TOYNE: Page 75, did you say?

Dr LIM: Page 75.

Dr TOYNE: Performance measures?

Dr LIM: Yes, performance measures. Just looking at elective surgery waiting lists, or waiting times for Category 1 and 2, obviously, there are significant delays even for patients supposedly in Category 2. Only 68% of them were treated within 90 days. I assume that the other 32% have slipped into Category 3?

Mr GRIEW: Let me first make the comment that that is not how the categories work. They are still in Category 2 and still have a priority for access to theatre. We do not suddenly recategorise them and say: 'Your priority has now slipped' ...

Dr LIM: Well, if ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, let him finish, please.

Mr GRIEW: Yes, that is a performance statistic. That says that 68% of people in that year were seen within the 90 days. You will notice that the estimate for 2005-06 is 70%.

Dr LIM: Yes, that is right. Thank you for the explanation. However, it also says to me that 32% of the patients were not seen within the 90 days, which is in the Category 2, so they have slipped outside the 90 days. Am I not right?

Mr GRIEW: That is correct. What that is saying is that we have met the target in 68% of cases; the target defined that way.

Dr LIM: All right. You have not reclassified those patients but, in fact, they are not being serviced within the 90 days that you planned to for those patients that you have classified as Category 2 elective surgery. These are the people for whom a clinical decision has been made. This patient is a Category 2 patient and, yet, you set your own benchmark that they have to be treated within 90 days. 32% of those patients do not receive treatment within 90 days.

Mr GRIEW: That is correct. Let me also say that if we go to, for example, Alice Springs Hospital, for which I have here the projected number of procedures: elective procedures still running at 1887 for 2005-06, Royal Darwin Hospital 5095. The amount of elective surgery that we are doing is very high. People are allocated to categories and, in common with every other health system in Australia, we meet the

target we set ourselves for that category of patients in most cases. We do not make it in all cases, largely because of the amount of emergency work that we also do which has been increasing in some of those centres year on year as well.

Dr LIM: I grant you that, and I do not have difficulties with your statistical analysis. What I am saying is that clinicians see these patients, they have decided that this particular patient had to be treated within 30 days, this particular patient needs to be treated within 90 days. However, the system fails to deliver the surgery, or whatever is required, within the appropriate time decided by the clinicians. It is often the case that government says: 'Oh, we cannot do anything about it; it is the clinician's decision'. The clinicians have made the decisions. I am asking you: once the decision is made, why has the clinician's decision not been followed through by the health system?

Mr GRIEW: It is also a clinician who makes the decision that a person needs an emergency operation. What the hospital must do in each case is balance, every day, the priority decisions of one group of clinicians working in emergency and critical care medicine, and one group of clinicians working across the rest of the hospital. It is absolutely the case that people on elective surgery waiting lists have a priority. However, that priority every day must be managed and balanced against the clinical decision-making coming out of the Emergency Department as well.

Dr LIM: That means that once you rely on a clinician to make their decisions, the system does not support the clinicians to achieve the outcome that they have desired, in spite of the huge amount of money that you are receiving each year?

Mr GRIEW: With respect, we have given two examples of that this morning: the rapid assessment unit in Royal Darwin has a system improvement to free the system up, and the moves of overflow waiting beds from Alice Springs Emergency Department to be moved out of the Day Procedure Unit in order to free up elective surgery.

Dr LIM: We will have to wait and see how that performs, because we do not know yet. It was launched yesterday or the day before?

Dr TOYNE: We announced it as part of the budget. What we talked about yesterday is the beginning of the recruitment of those staff and the location of the interim arrangement for the unit and the permanent location and what we are going to do. It is actually moving very quickly. I imagine the hospital is as keen as you are to see these improved throughput of patients put in place, because it will impact not only on the elective surgery waiting lists, but also on the crowding problems within our Emergency Departments.

Dr LIM: In the meantime, facilities such as transit centres - whatever you want to call them - are utilised to try and allow patient flow-through to improve. Can you tell me what is happening with the Alice Springs Hospital chapel? I was told when it was converted into a transit centre it was going to be a very temporary thing. As of yesterday, I understand that the hospital chapel continues to be a transit centre; that all the paraphernalia associated with the chapel has been removed and that, in fact, the room is locked after hours so nobody can access it, except by special request. There is no hospital chapel any more.

Dr TOYNE: The reason the transit centre is still being maintained in that area at the hospital is that it has been so successful in relieving some of the pressures on the bed lock in the hospital. On my information, there are other spaces that have been offered to operate the chapel. However, the hospital's primary core requirement is to provide care to the patients. If a transit lounge ...

Dr LIM: Which includes religious and ...

Dr TOYNE: That aside. The point is that the area that the transit lounge has been established in, in Alice Springs, has been a successful innovation. Everyone has agreed that it has had a positive effect on throughput of patients. That has to be maintained as a benefit to the work of the hospital. If the chapel is not yet relocated, I will find out why. I fully support the need to maintain the transit lounge, because it is one of the many issues or solutions that we had to put into place to make better use of the beds there. Robert.

Mr GRIEW: I was in Alice Springs Hospital recently and the general manager showed me the transit lounge where the chapel had been. It was also explained to me how it was possible, with some very minor works, to establish a place both for important spiritual and religious reflection and space for patients and families, and also to provide for a transit lounge. My understanding of that - I would be happy to confirm it, and I will confirm it to the minister - is that that was the plan. However, I believe it probably requires some minor partitioning.

Dr LIM: Can you give me any understanding of when that will happen?

Mr GRIEW: It would probably be sensible for me to get that advice directly and up to date.

Dr LIM: All right. Moving away from that, minister, obviously to try to maintain the throughput in all our hospitals, we need to have adequate staffing numbers. How many full-time equivalent nursing positions are allocated for each of the Territory's hospitals?

Dr TOYNE: I am having a look through for that. While they are pulling those figures out for you, I want to make it absolutely clear what happens with nurse numbers through the year; that there is a significant flux of nurses through nursing positions. We fund the positions, the department then recruits to those funded positions, which are held in place. To give you some of the figures of actual turnover of nurses within FTE positions that are funded: Royal Darwin, for example, has a 36% turnover over a 12-month period; Alice Springs, 70%; Katherine, 59%; Gove, 43%; and Tennant Creek, 68%.

When you asked how many nurses are employed, we can give you a snapshot on a pay period, but you have to keep in mind that there are comings and goings all the time through those positions. Obviously, we would be doing everything we can to stabilise retention wherever we can offer conditions to do that. I will get Robert to give you those numbers as whichever pay it is going to be.

Dr LIM: Yes, okay.

Mr GRIEW: You will be gratified to know I have been getting the information from two sources, so it is exactly the same. As at pay 23 of 2005-06: Tennant Creek Hospital, 24 nurses; Royal Darwin Hospital, 681 nurses; Katherine Hospital, 81 nurses; Gove District Hospital, 47 nurses; and Alice Springs Hospital, 329 nurses.

Dr LIM: I accept the minister's explanation that it is a snapshot in time. I notice there will also be fluctuations of numbers from effective full-time places versus the number of spaces that are allocated. On average, what is the shortfall in percentage terms across each of the hospitals?

Mr GRIEW: Against pay 1 of last year, that is almost 12 months ago, which is a marker of movement, there has been an increase of 30 in the number of nurses, with Royal Darwin Hospital running at 16 nurses over its estimated nurse budget for this year, and Alice Springs Hospital running 19 over. To give you the complete picture, it is important to note that this also reflects the success of nursing recruitment strategies which had, as their aim if you recall, to decrease that dependence on agency nurses. Agency nurse numbers are down substantially as we move towards a more full-time, permanent nursing workforce. While I stress the increase in nurse numbers here, that also marks a decrease in dependency on agency nurses. There is some netting out there, but the picture is, in both of the big hospitals, we are ahead of our estimate in terms of nurse workforce.

Dr LIM: Minister, the CEO responded by saying that there are certain numbers above budget. I would prefer if the figures could be given as to the number there are established for each hospital and the actual positions that are filled - whether there are any vacancies. You can shift the budget around at any one time and say for this particular budget you find a number of nurses. What are the numbers that are specifically allocated per hospital and how many of them are filled? What is the percentage of vacancies in these hospitals?

Dr TOYNE: I will get Robert to give you those figures.

Mr GRIEW: Increasingly, modern hospitals and other human services do not run on establishment, but on staffing budgets. The establishment is a measure of the number of positions that have been described at some point in time. It is not either the number you need or the best integration of the workforce. We tend not to disestablish positions. A better way of framing the question to get at the information you are after is are we getting the nurses we need for the job; to look at the actual budget for nurses which can be expressed in full-time equivalent terms.

The estimated budget for 2005-06 for the hospitals were: Alice Springs Hospital, \$312m; Gove District Hospital, \$47m; Katherine Hospital, \$83m; Royal Darwin Hospital, \$674m; and Tennant Creek Hospital, \$25m. Just to go back to those, that would compare to actual numbers of \$329m versus \$312m target in Alice Springs Hospital; \$47m versus \$47m in Gove; \$81m versus \$83m in Katherine, that is down \$2m; \$681m versus \$674 in Darwin; and \$24m against a target of \$25m in Tennant Creek, so it is down \$1m.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I have been told is, essentially, the department provides a particular budget to a hospital and they fit the number of nursing staff around the budget. Is that not rationing health care? That is what you are doing; you are rationing health care to Territorians.

Dr TOYNE: In staffing or putting general resources into any hospital, you have to try to match the resource allocation to some situation of demand. In modern hospital management, you do not just simply put resources in endlessly, or put it in to spikes in demand. You look at, historically, how much demand is coming into the hospital and, then area by area in the hospital, what is a safe and sustainable staffing level. Using all those factors, you then come to some sort of conclusion about the numbers of staff that are needed there now.

That work is not only done by our agency but it is scrutinised by the national processes of quality and safety as part of the accreditation of our hospitals. I can only say that the hospitals we inherited were 64% less resourced to handle the demand that was coming in to them. It is one of those questions where you can ask if you have too many nurses, doctors, or specialists. In proper management, yes, you can; you can have too many or not enough. What is put into a hospital is not only a massive increase in resources that we actually have and can demonstrate, but also a lot of judgments about what has happened with demand and what is an appropriate resource to respond to it.

Dr LIM: Funny that you still continue to compare with past governments.

Dr TOYNE: I would not think you would like that, actually.

Dr LIM: You would remember also, minister, that the only strike action taken against the government is in your time as the Health Minister and never before. You would think that if nurses were that badly done by in the past, they would have least taken strike action against the County Liberal Party government. They never did.

Dr TOYNE: They certainly did. They did so!

Dr LIM: It also puts a mockery, minister, when I ask you this question. I put this question to you, minister, that it puts a mockery to your assertions over and over again that you have recruited 100 nurses. It is a meaningless figure, isn't it, that you have recruited 100 new nurses? What does that mean in staffing hospitals so that they have enough nurses to provide good clinical care for all patients in the Territory?

Dr TOYNE: People would very quickly notice if we stopped effectively recruiting nurses or any other of the health professionals, because you would notice gaps appearing all over the place. The fact is that we have not only recruited to the numbers that were apparent; for example, the total numbers in our system at the moment. In July 2004, we had 1324 nurse positions; we have increased that. By July 2005, it had gone up by 103 to 1427; by March this year to 1544, which is an increase of 220.

From the figures that Robert Griew shared with you, substantially those positions have been maintained and filled even though, as I have said earlier, these are snapshots across the operating year of the health system, and there will be fluctuations through it. There is no doubt that the substantial extra money we have put into nursing positions is resulting in more real live nurses out there providing care.

Dr LIM: Then tell me can you divide your nurses up into midwives, registered nurses and renal nurses for each Territory hospital?

Dr TOYNE: Well ...

Mr GRIEW: We could break it - yes, we have those numbers and we can certainly provide them. It may be necessary if we wanted to break them up ... Yes, I have the numbers here by classification. I am not sure that I have those numbers here by discipline. We may have the classification of nurses in their seniority, without having separated out midwives, psychiatric nurses, renal nurses and so on.

Dr LIM: You would expect that nurses working at the midwifery section would be midwives. You would not use an RN to work in such a unit?

Mr GRIEW: Your assumption is right. There are occasions when nurses who are general nurses will work with more specialist nurses in different departments. The general proposition is right. One of the challenges is that there are shortages of some specialties in nursing across Australia, as in medicine.

Dr LIM: I cannot find the exact page in the annual report, minister, but your CEO wrote that some clinics are run not by midwives but by nurses with obstetrics capacity. Can you explain what that means?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do we have the actual quote?

Dr LIM: If you give me the electronic data, the electronic CD of this and I will search it for in like five seconds, but it is in here.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Oh, it is just that you are asking to comment on something that we are not really sure about.

Dr LIM: I was hoping the CEO would understand what I am saying.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, I would like to know what the quote was.

Mr GRIEW: You are saying that we use the term 'nurses with obstetric capacity'?

Dr LIM: That is right.

Mr GRIEW: You want to know exactly what that means.

Dr LIM: Yes, that is right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can you find the quote?

Dr LIM: Yes, I will find my quote.

Mr GRIEW: There are levels ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Mr Griew, I would be reluctant for you to comment on anything without a quote.

Dr LIM: The Chairman is protecting you, that is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, Bob gives ...

Dr TOYNE: And rightly so, too - and rightly so.

Dr LIM: And rightly so. You cannot fight your own battles, minister.

Dr TOYNE: If you are going to quote a public servant, you better substantiate the quote.

Dr LIM: Well, the report is written by your department so, surely, you should know what you have written?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No one is disputing that it may be there. Just show us what it is, member for Grotorex?

Dr LIM: While I keep on searching, I will continue to ask the questions. We will come back to that later. You told me before that you have a significant attrition rate as well. How many nurses have left the hospital system or the health system in the Northern Territory in the last 12 months?

Dr TOYNE: We have already given you the percentages of turnover for the nursing workforce, and that is probably ...

Dr LIM: As close as you can get to it?

Dr TOYNE: You have the percentages, the total nurse numbers for each hospital, so you can do a bit of arithmetic.

Dr LIM: Okay, I will do my own arithmetic. That is okay, it is not a difficult thing for us. Minister, can you also provide the numbers of qualified nurses - enrolled, registered or midwives or better qualified - who are employed in administrative roles?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, the number of nurses ...

Dr LIM: Nurses who are employed in administrative roles.

Mr GRIEW: We probably need to have a clearer understanding of what you mean by administrative role. Do you mean a generalist, administrator, policy ...

Dr LIM: Administrative, not doing any clinical load.

Mr GRIEW: A person who is the rostering nurse manager or in a clinical teaching capacity? I guess that it is a bit unclear.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If I may give some assistance? Do you mean someone with an RN classification who is not on clinical duties? Would that be right?

Dr LIM: That is fine.

Mr GRIEW: In the nursing workforce, people employed as nurses?

Dr LIM: People who are graduate nurses, or previously on-the-job trained nurses, who are not at the coalface, in the front line, dealing with patients – specifically, clinical care - and are now working as administrators.

Dr GRIEW: We would be unable to provide that information because we would not hold the records of every employee employed in any positions regarding their tertiary qualifications. There may be teachers, nurses, any number of different kinds of professionals who work in different capacities across the service. They would not have declared themselves to us as once having been nurses. On the other hand, we probably could attempt some analysis of people employed in nursing positions whose duties are, essentially, managerial or administrative, in the sense that you defined. That would require, though, some analysis.

Dr LIM: Minister, you have me foxed here with finding the reference to obstetrics capacity. I am not able to find it very quickly. However, we will move on. Are you prepared to table the document you read out from earlier relating to the number of nurses you have recruited over the past years, including those you have lost through attrition?

Mr GRIEW: We have a nursing workforce report which has these statistics in it which can be made available.

Dr LIM: I appreciate that, if you can make that available.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that the report there, minister?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, that is fine. We will table that.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Minister, you also mentioned earlier that you are trying to reduce the number of agency nurses working in our hospitals. What is the percentage, or how many are there working full-time in our hospitals at the moment?

Dr TOYNE: Agency nurses?

Dr LIM: Yes.

Mr GRIEW: We have that number by cost, given that is a contract. That is how we most easily measure it. I can give you the expenditure by hospital for 2004-05 and the three quarters of 2005-06.

Dr LIM: What is the average cost per agency nurse - so I can do your sums again, if you are not able to do it yourself - provided in the notes?

Mr GRIEW: I would have to get advice on that, because it will depend on the mix of agencies to whom we went. If I could quickly run through the figures: in 2004-05, we spent \$3.6m in Alice Springs Hospital; \$57 000 at Gove Hospital; \$623 000 at Katherine Hospital; \$2.9m at Royal Darwin and \$101 000 at Tennant Creek, a total of \$7.3m. Over three quarters of this year - so one would have to increase these estimates

by a third to get the fourth quarter - we have spent \$863 000 at Alice Springs Hospital; \$459 at Gove Hospital; \$119 000 at Katherine Hospital; \$1.4m, so it less than half at Royal Darwin; and \$83 000 at Tennant Creek. That is \$2.5m, so we are heading for spending an estimated \$3.3m in 2005-06 on agency nurses compared to \$7.3m last year. That is the reference on that earlier to the successive substitute and permanent positions through recruitment.

Dr LIM: Health administration staff - that is staff that work with the CEO - can you break them down by levels, employed as at 31 December 2001, and now 31 December 2005?

Dr TOYNE: We are talking generally in the agency?

Dr LIM: In Territory Health. You have a big bureaucracy. Can you provide me with figures broken down by levels as of 31 December 2001 and 31 December 2005, so I can compare to see how much your department has grown by?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I have some clarification here please, minister? Does that question relate to Output Group 1.1, Admitted Patient Services?

Dr TOYNE: It is whole of agency.

Mr GRIEW: Then I would suggest that it more appropriately ...

Dr LIM: This is part of – without that, you cannot have hospitals running.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, this particular output group - but I am sure that we will get to it as we go through all the outputs - it is structured in such a way now. I am aware that other members wish to ask questions and that why it is structured in this way, so that various interests can be interrogated. Minister, I would appreciate it if you could keep to matters of relevance - answer those that are relevant to this output group and maybe we can move through quicker.

Dr TOYNE: Certainly can, yes.

Dr LIM: So you are delaying the question?

Dr TOYNE: We will defer it until we get to after the output groups.

Dr LIM: All right. We come to the radiation oncology service, minister, if I may? I am sure you are aware of this report that was tabled in federal parliament at the request of Trish Crossin, the Labor Senator for the Northern Territory. When did that report come to your attention, minister?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, is this the Frommer report?

Dr LIM: The Frommer report, yes.

Dr TOYNE: That was commissioned jointly between our agency and the federal government to assess the liability, or the requirements, to set up a radiation oncology unit here in the Territory. Since the report was completed, it has been the basis on which we have developed the negotiations with the potential operator of the radiation oncology unit, and our negotiations or approaches to the federal government regarding potential support from them.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that - the report is dated 19 July 2004. Am I correct in the assumption that you have had this report, or you were aware of the contents of the report, since around that time?

Dr TOYNE: Yes. It is a working document within the two agencies, obviously, because it was jointly conducted. The federal Health minister recently approached us to have it released publicly because of the amount of conjecture that was going on in the public debate over the potential unit being established. We had no problem with that. Both agencies have had it for the period of time since it was commissioned and, as I said earlier, it has formed the basis of much of the discussions that have taken place.

Dr LIM: What was the hold-up to the release of this document?

Dr TOYNE: It is an internal working document. We considered that the important thing was to get on with the negotiations and to try and come up with a viable proposal, which we are now very close to achieving.

Mr GRIEW: I add to the minister's answer that this was a report that was actually paid for by the Commonwealth government. It has been fully available to both departments. At a departmental level, there has never been any discussion of releasing it. It was a document commissioned by us both and, in fact, at the suggestion of the Commonwealth. They paid for it. The response to it was the government putting \$500 000 extra into services to support oncology patients in the meantime.

Dr LIM: Sure. There was a huge public call for the release of the Frommer report to you, minister, and I am curious to know why you chose not to release it in spite of the public calls for it to be released.

Dr TOYNE: I certainly contest whether it was a huge public call. It is a question of whether the report is the object of the exercise, or whether the establishment of the radiation oncology service is the object of the exercise. We have never shifted our focus from seeking ways in which to make a viable service available to Territorians here in Darwin. That was our focus. At the time that Tony Abbott approached us and said: 'We would like to put this out just to inform the public debate', we had no problem with that. It simply was not our focus to release it and be out there talking about it.

Dr LIM: You have been aware that in this report it says that the utilisation rate of the radiotherapy by NT cancer patients is the lowest in Australia; that many patients who would benefit from radiotherapy do not receive it; and those who elect to travel interstate for treatment endure up to eight weeks of domestic disruption at a time when they are facing a major life-threatening illness? You are aware of those comments that were contained ...

Dr TOYNE: Let us get a balanced picture of what the Frommer report said. It was also saying that there were some serious ...

Dr LIM: No, I asked if you are aware of those comments.

Dr TOYNE: No, no, come on, if you are going to quote the report, let us get a balanced view on the record. The report also said that there were serious challenges in gaining and maintaining the specialised staff needed to run such a unit; there were serious challenges in the technical support for the unit; there were serious issues with the number of patients who would be available to maintain the viability of the service. The outcome of the total report was really to say it is a line ball and, certainly, speaking against a stand alone unit being established by the Territory government alone. They were very clear that we would need to be in partnership with a broader service.

Dr LIM: It is strange, is it not, minister, that many other commentators and readers of this document feel that the Frommer report recommended that a radiation oncology unit be established in Darwin, whereas what you are saying is all the too hard things that will prevent it from working? Is it not a fact that the Frommer report wrote '... irrefutable arguments exist to support the establishment of a radiotherapy service in the NT as part of a new radiation oncology unit in Darwin at the Royal Darwin Hospital'?

Dr TOYNE: Well, we accepted that.

Dr LIM: You accepted that?

Dr TOYNE: That is why we are still working on it. It also said that the devil is very much in the detail of how such a service would be established, and that we would need to seek the involvement of a broader service to make it viable here in Darwin. That is what led us, as a result of receiving the report, to not only put out the interim arrangements of the support of cancer patients, but also to put out an expression of interest to see if we could find a suitable operator to guarantee that we could get highly specialised staff as needed, and retain them in providing the service.

The arguments put to us very clearly was that we were not going to be able to recruit radiation oncologists. They are very rare beasts, and they will go to units that are dealing with 1000-plus patients. They will not come to a stand alone unit that would be dealing with 200 patients. That is the industrial reality that was pointed out by Frommer and others as to the basis for establishing a unit.

What I can say here - and I have said on the public record before - is that not for one second have we backed off from trying to get this going. We are taking the expert opinion from Frommer and other sources

that says be very careful with the detail and make sure, and you are going to need the help of the federal government and the support of a larger treatment unit.

Dr LIM: You have demeaned the Frommer report. He quotes larger figures of patients requiring treatment in Northern Australia and Northern Territory than you are suggesting with your 200 figure. Are you also aware that the Frommer report estimated that the nett cost per patient for radiotherapy treatment in the new radiation oncology unit in Darwin would be slightly less than \$8000 each? That is a very small amount of money to treat a cancer patient in Darwin. Are you saying that is not worth spending?

Dr TOYNE: Your moral outrage is a bit hard to understand, given that we have said all along that we want to do this. If we had said: 'No, we are not going to support an oncology unit for the Northern Territory', then I could understand why you would want to take us to task, but the fact is that we have not for one moment relaxed our efforts to make this initiative happen.

Further to your point about the number of patients, one of the big difficulties we have in getting an equitable coverage of cancer patients in the Territory, which we are absolutely anxious to do – and you would know as well as I – is that Central Australian cancer patients are going to be of mixed feelings about whether they want to come to Darwin or go elsewhere. That is a problem ahead of us that we need to deal with; that not all cancer patients in the Northern Territory would necessarily prefer to come to Darwin for treatment, they may well prefer to go to Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne or Sydney because they have family or friends there who can support them. This is a very complex task in front of us that we have been given. We are very close to finding a way through to getting a unit established here in Darwin, but that will not be the end of the story for Central Australians. We have to work with groups and individual patients to work out what is the best and most equitable coverage for them.

Dr LIM: Minister, you demean this report even more by quoting that because that issue of Central Australian cancer patients has been factored into the Frommer report - clearly, factored into the Frommer report - and you still try to make excuses to tell us why you are not going to put the cancer unit or an oncology unit up here in Darwin ...

Dr TOYNE: Come on, let us not put words into it. I have never said that.

Dr LIM: ... which would be really unfair now. Let me bring you to the figures ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, member for Greatorex.

Dr TOYNE: No, I ask that that be withdrawn because it is clearly untrue. I have never said at any occasion that we are not going to establish a cancer unit. On the opposite, I have been out there, every single time that I have been reporting steps in our work, re-asserting that this government is committed to it. Therefore, it is quite wrong for you to be putting that assertion on the public record.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, as I have said to other committee members, I am happy to entertain your rather large preamble to questions, but I will not entertain statements. If you wish to have a bit of preamble and question following by all means, but if you go on to a statement then I will rule it out.

Dr LIM: Minister, would you not concede that, had you commenced the development of the radiation oncology unit when you received this report in July 2004 you would probably have one up and running today?

Dr TOYNE: I certainly would not.

Dr LIM: Cancer patients would not have to wait another two years and putting up with the hardships of having to travel interstate to get their treatment.

Dr TOYNE: I do not concede that at all. In fact, I have already stated very clearly during this interrogation that we have been working continuously since the Frommer report was available to us to find a viable project to present to Territorians. What I have said all the way through very clearly is that we will not go forward until there is a safe and sustainable proposal drawn together with the proper support from the federal government and an external operator to provide the sustainable staffing and technical support for the unit. I have set those criteria and shared those criteria very clearly with the Territory people. We have worked continuously on this project. This has not been a case of just simply writing a cheque and setting up a unit and hoping for the best. We have to have a sustainable and safe model of care in the Northern Territory. That is what we are working towards and have nearly achieved now. When I announce that we

go forward with this project, I will have absolute certainty in my mind that we are offering a safe, sustainable service to Territory patients. That is the absolute least that they deserve.

Dr LIM: Are you aware that the Frommer report has factored all those concerns you just expressed into their report; that they are confident that it would be very viable, and the patient numbers are more than enough to satisfy two linear ...

Dr TOYNE: They did not say that. Come on, you are being dishonest.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, is there a question in there?

Dr LIM: I am asking if he is aware that the Frommer report has recommended that you can have a two linear accelerator service in Darwin and have enough patient demand to continue to operate these two machines for well into the future.

Dr TOYNE: You are repeating the same point. I have already responded to it. I have said that that is not all the Frommer report said. It said that we have to be very careful with the detail of sustainability. That is what we also listened to when we received the report. That is why it has been a more complex problem to deal with than simply saying: 'Oh, yes, Frommer has told us to go ahead'. That is not what Frommer said. Frommer said that, yes, there is a basis for getting such a service going in the Northern Territory, but you have to be very careful with the detail if it is going to be a safe and sustainable service. That is what we have been working on, and we will complete the task when we complete the task.

Dr LIM: The way I read this document, minister - and I am sure you would read the same - it said Frommer has recommended a viable and safe system. I am sure Dr Frommer will be professional enough not to recommend something that is unsafe for you to have. When you said that you have to be very careful and I told you that it would cost less than \$8000 per patient for between 300 to 500 patients in the Northern Territory, you are so considerate about it, but your government is prepared to sink in hundreds of millions of dollars into the waterfront project. Surely, cancer patient treatment is more essential, more needed. The money should be spent where it is more needed. Do not you agree with that?

Dr TOYNE: Let us put this to rest. Quoting directly from section 5.7 of the Frommer report, page 55, 'Barriers to a viable radiation-oncology service in the NT':

The development of a radiation-oncologist service obviously carries an appreciable opportunity cost. Radiation oncology has great value, both for cancer patients and as an important component of a sophisticated health system for the community of the NT. It is a matter for the NT government to weigh the value of providing a radiation-oncology service against other priorities. A radiation-oncology service should only be developed if there is a commitment to safety, quality and sustainability.

The establishment of a radiotherapy service in the NT carries three broad types of risk:

- (1) the risk of being unable to recruit and retain professional staff with expertise that is in short supply, and of being unable to provide a continuous service without interruption due to technical factors;*
- (2) the risk that expensive equipment will be under-utilised ...*

If patients are referred elsewhere:

... leading to a higher unit cost per service delivery; and

- (3) the risk that other health-care services in the NT will not be able to provide the expertise and capacity to support the management of radiation-oncology patients.*

They are the risks, in writing, from the Frommer report. They are the risks that we are managing with the approach that we have taken to the establishment of the service. It has not dissuaded us one iota from continuing to pursue the establishment of this service. It will be done with full account of the risks that Frommer has brought to us. If you are going to talk about Frommer, that is the other side of the story that you are choosing not to purport.

Dr LIM: Dr Frommer also says, minister, if you are aware of this:

Does the Northern Territory need the radiotherapy facility? This is the fundamental question applied in our Terms of Reference. For three reasons the answer is yes.

Reason (1), (2) and (3) I do not need to elaborate on. He says to you that some 347 patients would have required radiotherapy back in 2001. We are now in 2006 ...

Dr TOYNE: But where were they living?

Dr LIM: ... and by 2010, there will be a greater number ...

Dr TOYNE: Where were they living?

Dr LIM: ... that require treatment then than there is now.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is there a question there?

Dr LIM: My question is, minister, are you aware ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is there a question there, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Minister, are you aware ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, can I ...

Dr LIM: I have a question ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No. I remind you that it is now 12.39 pm. We will be breaking at 1.05 pm. We are still on Output 1.1. We have spent quite a lot of time on this report ...

Dr LIM: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It seems to be a bit like table tennis, going backwards and forwards.

Dr LIM: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, it is your time.

Dr LIM: You have just wasted another minute of it. Minister, are you aware that patients who travel interstate for radiotherapy services face huge financial burdens because the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme does not provide adequate assistance for them?

Dr TOYNE: We have put \$500 000 into further support for the very patients you are talking about. Yes, I am aware that living in capital cities while being treated is a cost to the patients. There is no ...

Dr LIM: Okay. Can you then tell me ...

Dr TOYNE: ... over and above the amount we put in.

Dr LIM: ... in terms of the \$0.5m you have added to it, is it \$0.5m per year?

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Dr LIM: Can you tell me also in more detail, how is the \$0.5m spread out.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, I just seek your clarification. It has been raised with me by the member for Braintree that she believes that these questions are in line with Output Group 1.2.

Dr LIM: The outpatients who are cancer patients in hospital as well as the ... what are you talking about? If they are ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am asking the minister to address if it is relevant to Output Group 1.1 but, if not, to wait until we get to Output Group 1.2. Minister, it is your call.

Dr TOYNE: I can talk about the positions that some of that money has been used to establish, on the basis that we want to minimise the need for patients to travel, but also to increase the capacity to provide other aspects of the treatment here in the Northern Territory. I am referring to the haematologist, the cancer nurse and the oncologist who are currently based as the treatment team at the Royal Darwin Hospital. The Patient Assistance Travel Scheme is a different area and I prefer to leave that for that output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Next question, please.

Dr LIM: I am still on the Frommer report. Minister, do you want to leave the description of how are you going to spend that \$0.5m for later on?

Dr TOYNE: I have just given ...

Dr LIM: What really concerns me is your attitude towards the patients with cancer. You knew; you had this report in your hand for two years ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Question is?

Dr LIM: You just hold your tongue!

Mrs BRAHAM: I do not think I will be needing it.

Dr LIM: Minister, you had this report for two years and, I am sure - or maybe you are not, I will ask you the question. Are you aware of the comments that were made in this report about the hardships that patients with cancer suffer under the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme? Were you aware of that?

Dr TOYNE: I am very aware at a very personal level because many of them happen to be my friends. However, the point is that your moral outrage that you are trying to project across here would be appropriate if we had actually taken the report and done nothing about it. In fact, what we have done is work continuously on getting a viable project together since we were aware of that report and other advice that we had available at the time. We have not dropped the ball on this; we are working towards a viable project. We are honouring not only what Frommer had to say to us, but also the needs of those patients.

Save your morale outrage for someone else. I sleep very comfortably at night on this issue because I know that we have left no stone unturned on finding a viable project to present to the Territory community that is safe and sustainable according to the advice that we have been given.

Mr Chairman, I really do not know that there is much more that we can extract out of this endless ...

Dr LIM: Well, then, let me put this question to you ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: If ...

Dr LIM: Let me put this question to you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, the minister has indicated that he has spoken all he is going to speak on the report. I will rule any further questions on the Frommer report out of order. I believe it is time for us to move on to other areas.

Dr LIM: Hang on a minute! I have questions to ask of ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, that is my ruling.

Dr LIM: ... the minister. Well, I dissent from your ruling.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, put it in writing; we will get a ruling on it. Please continue.

Dr LIM: Minister, surely ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: There will be no more questions on the Frommer report.

Dr LIM: ... in two years that you have been aware that the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme has been under-supporting patients, you sat on that, you allowed patients to suffer for two years. That is why I am morally outraged. You allowed patients to suffer ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please do not raise your voice, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: ... underfunding the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme to assist them when they are travelling interstate.

Dr TOYNE: Well let us talk about PATS in Output 1.2 on the list.

Dr LIM: You are prepared to sit back, sleep in your bed every night for the last two years while patients ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex!

Dr LIM: ... suffer.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, that question is out of order, it belongs in Output 1.2. When we close off this output, by all means, talk about the PATS. You are wasting time, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: You have already stopped me from asking more about Frommer.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you finished questioning on points relating to Output 1.1.?

Dr LIM: No more for now.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Oh, excellent!

Mrs BRAHAM: I will be short and sharp and to the point. Minister, I know that you said earlier that the refurbishment for the Alice Springs Hospital comes under DPI. Could you tell me whether the cost of the refurbishment comes out of the Health budget or the DPI budget?

Dr TOYNE: The further allocations to that refurbishment will appear under the Health capital works budget, but that is held with DPI. We are the client agency for DPI. While the capital works is put against a health project, DPI will carry the whole process ...

Mrs BRAHAM: So, it does not affect your budget?

Dr TOYNE: No, no.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have a completion date for that refurbishment?

Dr TOYNE: It is a bit hard to estimate. I believe the current work is due for completion by October.

Mrs BRAHAM: October?

Dr TOYNE: I am basing that on talking to the contractors during my visit a couple of weeks ago. My responsibility is to make sure that the hospital operations can work around the refurbishment, not the actual details of the contracts.

Mr GRIEW: Can I clarify that? That would be the current projects. There is a series of interactive screens of building works that have to happen here which cover a large part of the hospital. Each one of them is dependent on completing the previous one, because you have to keep the hospital operating while we decant the wards as we go. To give an absolutely final end date is based on a certain degree of looking into the future about how each step goes serially; and they are finding different levels of work required. That probably is a question best answered by the minister responsible for public works because it is his people who are monitoring that work. We are just trying to keep the hospital operating around them.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is there a case against the project managers of the former refurbishment?

Dr TOYNE: Certainly there is. The minister Burns will be able to update you on that case.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, those legal costs will not come out of the Health budget.

Dr TOYNE: They will come out of the Justice budget.

Mrs BRAHAM: That will not affect your budget either?

Dr TOYNE: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you tell me what progress there is with Ward 4, the renal unit?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, I was in it the other day. That ward and the one upstairs have both been refurbished. Ward 4 will eventually carry the 15 additional beds as the first down payment of the 24 that we have promised over the term of government. They will also carry the eight renal stations that we are putting into the hospital to relieve some of the pressure on ...

Mrs BRAHAM: How many?

Dr TOYNE: Eight.

Mrs BRAHAM: They are not there yet though?

Dr TOYNE: It is all being built right now. As soon as the physical space is ready we will have those facilities put in.

Mr GRIEW: Our understanding is that they will be ready later this year. They will be used initially of course as a decanting space for the rectification works. The challenge here is to find the moment at which it is possible for the extra beds that have been created in the old private wing and the beds that are being created in Ward 4 - both of which we use for decanting - to then become available at some point for additional space to meet the government's election commitment and to help with the decongestion of the hospital. That is dependent on these other works.

Mrs BRAHAM: You are also expecting that to relieve the pressure on NT Health renal services?

Dr TOYNE: Certainly in having a greater dialysis capacity in the hospital gives them the chance to relocate, particularly patients who have multiple disease conditions that need other treatments as well.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you have also talked about the redevelopment of the Emergency Department at Alice Springs Hospital. Can you give me some idea of the timetable and cost?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, this financial year will be design work and, hopefully, at the end of that process we will have a design ready for funding thereafter. It is certainly understood under the government forward estimates that that project needs to be completed.

Mrs BRAHAM: It is design this financial year, possible construction next?

Dr TOYNE: Yes. I would put the word 'probable' instead of possible.

Mrs BRAHAM: What is happening to the Hospital in the Home? Remember, that was a pre-election promise?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, it is certainly the intention to extend Hospital in the Home to Alice Springs. In fact, I am aware that the medical staff there are already running an interim version of Hospital in the Home by out-posting ward-based staff to support some patients. I am getting frantic notes being written for me here. You comment.

Mr GRIEW: There is a \$196 000 allocation to Alice Springs Hospital in financial year 2006-07 to commence the Hospital in the Home programming in Alice Springs Hospital.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have any idea of how many patients in this interim period have been affected?

Mr GRIEW: The number of patients we are actually able to place depends on a whole range of factors. At the moment, we are creating the capacity, then we will see what the uptake is. It certainly has been very successful in Darwin, especially since we have run it through Royal Darwin Hospital with the increased budget. That is not ducking the question at all. We are very confident about playing our role, but we would not want to chance on an exact number at this point. We would have to write briefings as we establish it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Will that be staffed by hospital staff or community health staff?

Dr TOYNE: We are just trying to find out what the input actually means.

Mr GRIEW: It has been run as a hospital program. We have 24 patients in Darwin, to give you an example, although this would be a smaller unit. The question we have been asked, though, is how many staff we will be allocating in that \$196 000. Do we have the answer to that? We will find that out.

Dr TOYNE: It might give you some sense of scale if it is X number of nurses then they would be able to support X number of patients.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, that is a definite commitment to happen in Alice Springs? Minister, security in the Emergency Department at Alice Springs Hospital has been a concern, as you know. Can you tell me whether any measures have been implemented to increase the number of security staff, or some way to protect not just the nurses, also the other waiting patients?

Dr TOYNE: At the moment, there are two security personnel in the hospital and ...

Mrs BRAHAM: They rotate though.

Dr TOYNE: ... amongst other things they escort the nurses to the car park and go regularly through ED. You are probably aware also of our campaign of zero tolerance towards violence against health staff, not just in the hospitals, but right around the Territory. I will get a specific answer to that area of your question.

However, it probably needs to be said that one of the key things that we have to do is get on top of some of the alcohol-related behaviour in Alice Springs because, no matter where you put any number of security guards in the building, if you have intoxicated and out-of-control people coming in either as patients or with patients, it is just a very difficult situation.

Mrs BRAHAM: You can really isolate the hot spots and give them more attention.

Dr TOYNE: Yes, that is true, there are certainly known spots now. I do not know whether Mr Griew has anything to add.

Mr GRIEW: Yes. There are a couple of issues that are general to the Emergency Departments. There have been a number of things going across all of them in the last few years: training of staff; video surveillance; duress alarms and a very strong public message campaign about our zero tolerance of aggression towards our staff. Part of the rationale for the Alice Springs Hospital Emergency Department redevelopment is, undoubtedly, because it is a very congested environment sometimes, and that does increase the tendency of people to – our patients are there at a very stressful time. An unfortunate number are, in some ways, substance affected, and that can lead to that sort of aggression escalating. Our staff are increasingly well-trained in many high levels of skill at de-escalating situations, but the congestion makes it worse. One of the other reasons I referred to earlier - the moving of the overflow beds further away - is in order to decongest the Emergency Department environment as well. We are very conscious that that is an issue that places ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Trying to spread it out more.

Mr GRIEW: Yes, and move more people out in that environment when they are waiting. The redevelopment is an important part of that. However, in the meantime, there is the security contract, the surveillance, the very strong message about what is acceptable and what is not, and what we will not tolerate.

The other thing I mention quickly: in Alice Springs, in this coming financial year - and the work has already started - we are reconfiguring our mental health service locally to provide a more direct support to the Emergency Department in order to handle volatile situations. It handles those patients with specific

needs, and that will provide a greater capacity in the Emergency Department for handling situations as well. It is something we are very conscious of.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does the security costs come out of the Health budget, or DPI?

Mr GRIEW: No, the security cost is part of our budget. What I am trying to stress to you is, as a management issue, this is not entirely about security guards; it is about a total management solution.

Dr TOYNE: There was pretty graphic illustration of that if you saw the video; that the security guard was within a couple of metres of the nurse when the attack occurred.

Mrs BRAHAM: We all have stories, minister.

Dr TOYNE: It is a question of working on a number of the issues to try to alleviate the danger.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you monitor the number of double shifts nurses have to do?

Dr TOYNE: Yes, we do. I personally get a couple of reports each week on double shifts and overtime, and patient numbers, bed numbers, so ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Does it concern you; the amount of double shifts being asked of some nurses?

Dr TOYNE: If it gets high, yes, certainly that is not an ideal situation. However, we will be quickly aware of that development.

Mrs BRAHAM: I do have others, but I am mindful of the time, Mr Chairman, so I can always write to the minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are a good local member, member for Braiting. Are there any further questions that relate to Output 1.1? That being the case, that concludes – I think we have a ruling on the ... No, we do not have a ruling? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Non-Admitted Patient Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 1.2, Non-Admitted Patient Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, I understand there was a review of the St John Ambulance Service done by Mr McKay. Is the report available?

Dr TOYNE: No. We have repeatedly said that we do not see that it is appropriate to have that released. It was a joint report done between the government and St John. St John is a private organisation and it would not be, in our view, appropriate to make that report available to the public.

Dr LIM: Can St John make the report available without the government's consent?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister?

Dr TOYNE: Sorry, I misunderstood ...

Dr LIM: My question was ...

Dr TOYNE: No, no, let me put the record straight. The review was a Cabinet review. It was done at the behest of Cabinet, so that is the reason it is not releasable. Sorry about that, I did not ...

Dr LIM: I am under the impression that the adequacy of previous contracts between the Department of Health and St John have been inadequate in the level of funding. What rectification have you done, apart from the \$2m you just announced recently? What else have you done to assist St John to ensure that they have enough officers and vehicles?

Dr TOYNE: You say 'apart from the \$2m' as if it is some sort of throwaway line, but we have actually taken the base funding up from \$6.67m in 2002-03, to \$9.908m in 2005-06. The additional funding of \$2.74m which we provided in 2005-06 covered base recurrent funding, capital and equipment, wages and

EBA negotiations. The other thing that we have done to more directly work with St John is to establish the financial and operational group to delete some of the misunderstandings that can occur when a contractor is providing a service for a government. That group is now working through the operational issues that St John has brought concerns about. We are still optimistic that we can get through those and establish a stable and adequate service for St John.

Dr LIM: With an increased fleet of vehicles in Darwin, for instance? They need probably five or six, and they only have three at the moment to service the whole of Darwin.

Dr TOYNE: If they have issues such as that, that goes into the dialogue that we have established. They brought to us as their top priority the need to have additional crews to relieve the overtime that crews were working. That has been done in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

Mr GRIEW: Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine each have two new FTE paramedic positions as a result of that decision from government in response to St John.

Dr TOYNE: That was their top priority. If there are other priorities, they will bring it into this collaborative process and we will deal with it.

Dr LIM: I might leave it for the next person as I want to go to the last non-output specific area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, we will have to go through everything else before we get there.

Mrs BRAHAM: Output 1.2. At the moment, I believe you only give patients on PATS \$33 a day. Is that going to be increased?

Dr TOYNE: We are certainly over-viewing PATS. I would not call it a review because it is out of fashion at the moment. However, we are scoping the current way in which PATS operates and the coverage. It was never meant to be a scheme that fully covers patient costs; it is a subsidy to defray the costs of patients. What we are looking at is what is an appropriate level and whether we have the appropriate level and equitable coverage. There are issues with PATS about remoteness of patients and other issues that we need to look at.

We know that PATS is not only a scheme that is under considerable pressure, but it is certainly far from covering all of the needs of the patients, and patients still need to cover some of their own needs. However, it is a subsidy scheme, it is not a full cost scheme.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, I realise \$33 is not very much. However, did you resolve the problem of people from remote communities who are coming into a centre for mammograms or what have you, who were well people but could not claim PATS?

Dr TOYNE: We have had some recent approaches from some of the bush-based medical services of either our government-run ones or ones that we do jointly with the Commonwealth, or Commonwealth ones, and they are offering the prospect of a partnership to work on the ground to collect patients together into more efficient groups. The worse thing for our scheme is, if an air charter or a bus is sent out to a community and most of the patients do not turn up, it is not an efficient use whereas, if we have a strong working partnership with the bush-based services particularly, then maybe we will get a better outcome.

Mrs BRAHAM: But it also applies to people on pastoral communities, not just ...

Dr TOYNE: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: ... and they are the ones who get nothing at the moment. Do you want to add anything?

Mr GRIEW: Yes. PATS is a scheme run by the Territory Health system now which, like all other jurisdictions, we took over from the Commonwealth - the old IPTAS scheme. Under IPTAS and PATS, support is available for people who are being treated for diagnosed illnesses. It is not available, under its guidelines, for screening services on well people. That is the issue you are probably referring to and that is a common situation across PATS across jurisdictions. Both it and its predecessor scheme did not encompass or anticipate providing support for screening programs.

Mrs BRAHAM: You are aware of the disadvantage that causes?

Mr GRIEW: We are aware of the issue, absolutely, which is one of the reasons we put quite a bit of effort into trying to coordinate the screening programs. The challenge with breast screening in particular is that there is not a technological solution. We cannot take the equipment out. We put quite a lot of effort into trying to coordinate the timing and so on, because we have to do regional screening. There is not an easy answer to that question. PATS, certainly as it is currently structured, is not the answer to that question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, we will hold it there, I believe.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending as well as all officers who provided advice to the minister today.

The committee will resume at 1.30 pm to interrogate DBERD.

The committee suspended.

SPEAKER'S RULING

Motion of Dissent Moved by the Member for Greatorex

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now resume the hearings. Prior to the break there was a dissent motion lodged by the member for Greatorex, and I have received a response from the Acting Deputy Speaker:

I have received a copy of the dissent motion moved by the member for Greatorex, Dr Richard Lim MLA, to a ruling of the Chairman of the Estimates Committee, Mr Len Kiely MLA. I have considered the matter and rule in favour of the Chairman of the committee.

MINISTER HENDERSON'S PORTFOLIOS

Mr CHAIRMAN: I welcome the Minister for Business and Economic Development, and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I do wish to make a brief opening statement. I am happy to address questions and comments on the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development as a whole, and provide additional relevant details on specific policies, programs and activities.

I would like to introduce Mr Mike Burgess, Chief Executive of the department; and Ms Tracey Scott, Chief Financial Officer of the department and Tourism Northern Territory. Other officials behind me will be introduced if they need to provide supplementary evidence during the hearings.

The Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development is a new agency established in July 2005 incorporating the Business and Industry Development functions of the former DBIRD, the Regional Economic Development and Indigenous Economic Development functions of the previous Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs, and the Innovation and Knowledge Economy and the Economic Policy Units from the Department of the Chief Minister, as well as the Procurement Liaison function from NT Treasury. DBERD is also linked to Tourism NT and the Land Development Corporation.

The new department has allowed the Territory government to focus on and apply quality resources to the key economic development challenges that we are tackling head on. DBERD is structured around one output group called Economic Development with seven outputs: Regional Economic Development, Indigenous Economic Development, Business and Skilled Migration, Industry Development and Investment, Business Development, Innovation and Knowledge Economy, Industry and Economic Policy. These outputs incorporate all of the department's operating areas and reflect the government's priorities for Territory economic development.

Regional economic development is a priority for DBERD and government. We are rolling out regional economic committees across the Territory. These committees will advise governments and the private sector on opportunities for sustainable job creation and business growth for Territorians. They involve

community, private and public sectors working together. They will complement the activities proposed in the Northern Territory economic development framework 2006 to 2015 which is being finalised at present.

Indigenous economic development is also a key priority. The action is to implement the Territory's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy being coordinated by DBERD, and complements actions by other Territory government agencies, indigenous and community organisations, industry associations, business and the federal government. The strategy focuses on 13 identified industry sectors.

Business and Skilled Migration: consistent with the rest of the country, skill shortages in the Territory, especially in regional and remote areas, have been a major issue for business. The business and skilled migration strategy is assisting business to overcome shortages and supporting the attraction of new skilled business migrants to the Territory, and adding to our wonderful ethnic diversity. The number of skilled migrants to the Territory has almost doubled since the strategy was put in place.

Industry Developments and Investment: industry sector development support for the Defence, mining, service and supply, aviation development, bio-prospecting, marine services, manufacturing and other business sectors. This group seeks to leverage opportunities from major projects and investments through local industry participation plans, and industry assistance and commercial services for industry development.

Business Development: the business development program is aimed at developing a better informed and capable business community. Initiatives include the popular and successful October Business Month, business growth programs and related services, and the Upskills Workshops program. Procurement and liaison has also been established in the department since mid-September 2005 to resolve government procurement issues with Territory government agencies, to ensure prompt responses are provided.

Innovation and Knowledge Economy: includes working with the NT Research and Innovation Board and Fund to stimulate research and innovation through strategic partnerships. Government is continuing the research and innovation fund, boosting it to over \$1m for three years in 2007-08. This output group also manages the formal relationship between the Northern Territory government and Desert Knowledge Australia. Earlier this year, the government reaffirmed its commitment to the Desert Knowledge Precinct with funding of \$30.2m in the first stage.

Industry and Economic Policy: the Economic Development Summit work to complete the Territory economic development framework, based on summit outcomes has been planned, is coordinated and managed through this program. The framework is to provide a coherent policy framework for the continued growth of our economy, and has been based on the valuable contributions from all involved in the summit and regional forums.

Those are just a few open end remarks in regards to the structure of my agency. I am here to answer any questions the committee may have.

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

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Output 1.1 – Regional Economic Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development. I now call for questions in relation to Output Group 1.0, Economic Development, Output 1.1, Regional Economic Development. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, how many staff do you have working in the area of regional economic development and what classifications are they?

Mr HENDERSON: I will pass that over to my chief executive for a specific answer.

Mr BURGESS: Mike Burgess, Chief Executive. We have eight staff in the regional development area. I do not have the classifications with me, but I can get that to you if you require it.

Mrs MILLER: Yes please - on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, could you please restate that question?

Question on Notice

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. How many staff work in your department on regional economic development and what classification are they?

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

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, the answer is eight staff, but we will take on notice the classification. Hopefully, we will get that back by the end of this session. We should be able to do that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The question taken on notice is classification of eight staff working in that particular unit. For the purpose of Hansard I allocate that question No 5.1.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many reviews have been run by your department during the past four years in relation to regional economic development?

Mr HENDERSON: In regard to my department, as I said in my opening comments, this department has existed since July 2005. What we have done is commission a review that was done by Stanton Partners into the Regional Economic Development Boards that previously existed under the previous Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs. Part of that review, obviously, was to engage and consult with the members of those boards that existed across the Northern Territory. As minister, I also met with the boards as they did exist previously, and received feedback of how they believed they were tracking and some of the issues and concerns that board members had.

Specifically, we had one review. Out of that review came a recommendation that, essentially, we should move and refocus to specifically look at regional economic development, not in isolation of the social policy issues that surround regional development. The boards were saying that they wanted to be much more focused in identifying projects, priorities and trying to get some real runs on the ground. The Stanton report was provided back to board members. It is a public document if you would like a copy, member for Katherine.

Out of that came the decision to establish the regional economic committees. Five of those committees have now been appointed across the Northern Territory, letters of appointment have gone out to those members and, over the course of the next couple of months, I will be meeting with each of the new committees that have been established. Formal induction programs will be provided. The department has much better economic data for the regions than we previously had available. I am looking forward to working with the new committees over the next three years to get some very specific and tangible investment outcomes and better job outcomes through the regional areas of the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: How were the members of the committee in each region selected?

Mr HENDERSON: People were asked to nominate. There were advertisements placed in all of the regional papers. All members of the previous boards were asked if they wished to apply. It was a ministerial appointment that determined the make-up of the new committees.

Mrs MILLER: Do any of those committee members receive payment for sitting fees?

Mr HENDERSON: No, there is no sitting fees, but the department will cover - and it something we have to work through, reasonable costs - travel and accommodation if members have to attend. However, as previously, the boards sat there, providing advice, but with no real structural interface with government. There was a secretariat provided which, essentially, took the minutes. This time, we will have members, not only from the Northern Territory government, but also through the Commonwealth government - principally through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations - giving the training issues in regional areas, whilst the committees will actually be convened by regional DBERD officers. There is going to be a lot more support provided to these committees, with direct capacity to have input from Territory and Commonwealth government officials in what programs and services might be available to support the work of those committees in determining the priorities for the regions. There are no sitting fees, but much better support - and government membership of both the Territory and Commonwealth government on those committees.

Mrs MILLER: How often are they going to meet?

Mr HENDERSON: That will be a decision for the committees themselves. I have made a commitment that, wherever possible, I will try and meet with them. I made the commitment to attend as many meetings as I can. If I cannot get there in person, with the advent of much better communications facilities across the Northern Territory, I will be there by video conference link. I am very keen to engage with the committees and do what I can through government to ensure we get outcomes on the ground in the regions.

Mrs MILLER: You intend to be at as many of those meetings as you possibly can?

Mr HENDERSON: As I possibly can. The committees themselves will determine how often they want to meet. I am not being prescriptive; there is a term of reference for those committees. It really is people in the regions who are best able to identify where there may be potential investment opportunities for the regions. The type of work that we are looking to do is through the work the economists in my department can do in pulling together feasibility studies and, if the feasibility studies work through, developing up business proposals that can be taken to the marketplace almost investment ready. We can actually target in on specific, identified investment opportunities and try to get market attention to actually invest in those opportunities. That is what we are trying to do and I will give those committees as much support as I can personally.

Mrs MILLER: You spoke then, minister about feasibility studies. If a particular regional development committee asks for a feasibility study, will that be done through your department?

Mr HENDERSON: Certainly, the details of how that will work. We will do a reality check first. If there are opportunities there, then we have good economists in my department. There is also capacity through various funding programs to engage consultants. I do not know if you have any more to add, Mike? We would look at doing that work ourselves in the first cut or, if not, engage consultants to come in and do that.

Mr BURGESS: What this provides us with is the opportunity to be a lot more coordinated and focused about first defining opportunities and then moving into a business case development. We already have programs available through the Regional Development Fund to support development of proper business cases so that these things can be taken to the market if that is the ultimate outcome.

Mrs MILLER: If you are unable to be present at these meetings, minister, who will report to you?

Mr HENDERSON: Through the department, the regional director, wherever the economic committee is established, will attend all of those meetings. It will be the regional director's role to facilitate and be present at those meetings. I will receive reports and minutes of those meetings in the course of my work.

Mrs MILLER: Do you have any other government employees on these committees apart from the representative that would be in that area? Are there other government employees?

Mr HENDERSON: We have had formal response from DEWR - have we, Mike? - saying that they will participate, so there is going to be Commonwealth government representation, or a representative, on that committee. Also what we have said to the committees – and it was one of the issues that the regional development boards had - is that although we will be focusing on specific economic and investment and business development opportunities, obviously, throughout the Northern Territory there are going to be other issues that affect that potential. They could be in education, lack of training facilities in the region, law and order issues, or issues with infrastructure and roads. The committee will have the capacity to actually request that senior government officials from other areas of government come and present to the committee, hear the concerns, provide information that the committee might not be aware of regarding government programs and services to those regions.

They will have the capacity to request other presentations from other areas of government in relation to potential barriers to investment in their region, or what additional resources need to be provided by way of training facilities. In static membership there is the regional director from my department, the DEWR representative but, on a case-by-case basis, the capacity for those committees to call in other government agencies to provide information to the committee, or to take issues on board.

Mrs MILLER: That appears to be a vast improvement to what has been in place in the past, because it has traditionally be known as a talkfest with no teeth to it. I will be very pleased to see how that proceeds.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, member for Katherine. I hope that I still hold the portfolio and that I am back here next year. I will be able to demonstrate ...

Ms CARNEY: You might be leader by then.

Mr HENDERSON: ... to this committee some real outcomes and runs on the board. I want to see specific investment commitments and jobs that are created as a result of the work of these committees, and that is the target that I have set for myself.

Mrs MILLER: What you said before, though, that there are other aspects in regional areas that impact so much on being able to develop ...

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: ... that you are prepared to have representation to the committee and from the committee so that we are able to work through it. In fact, this committee that is being developed in each area is going to have a reasonable amount of clout in that particular region?

Mr HENDERSON: Very much so. At the end of the day, if you are talking about the marketplace, people have to be able to invest and expect a return. If there are barriers to that - whether it is an available workforce or there are infrastructure issues - then you are wasting your time seeking investment unless you deal with those issues. At the end of the day, I am looking for investment and enterprise opportunities and jobs being created in the region, so all of the issues have to be on the table and have to be dealt with, otherwise you are not going to have people investing.

Mrs MILLER: I know this probably comes under another output, but have you specifically requested that the committees, in their terms of reference, address the indigenous employment and opportunities in these regions?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That may well come under the next output.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, with respect, I suspect that it applies to both. If the minister is prepared to answer it as I think he has indicated, he might be allowed. I do not think ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you can keep it in on ...

Mr HENDERSON: I will keep it on the boil. I can give information in regard to the classification of those regional development staff. There are five at the AO6 level, two at the EO1 level and one AO7 - two EO1, one AO7, and five AO6.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of Hansard, that is in response to question No 5.1.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. One of the really significant problems that face regional economic development is the lack of airline capacity into regional Northern Territory. How will the development committees be able to address that issue?

Mr HENDERSON: That is a very good question, member for Katherine. Mike has some better detail because Mike chairs the inter-governmental working group on airline capacity. I suppose, from my level of knowledge, having worked through a number of issues with a number of carriers regionally over the years that I have had Business and Economic Development, these regional airlines and charter airlines work in and operate in the marketplace. At the end of the day, unless communities - which also includes government; and there has been a lot of debate about whether government should mandate public servants' travel on regional carriers - support those airlines, then the market is going to walk away from them. We do have an open skies policy in the Territory; we do not have regulated routes and scheduled routes. It is a significant issue. There is a working group across government that looks at those issues. Mike chairs that, and I might hand over to Mike for a more up-to-date account of where we are at.

Mr BURGESS: I chair the NT government aviation committee. We have representatives on that from a number of government agencies. We also have representatives from NT Airports Ltd. The issue of regional airline capacity has been an issue for us for as long as I have been in the Territory. What has happened in the last decade or so is that the fundamental business costs in the regional airline industry, not just in the Territory but throughout Australia, has increased enormously because of additional safety issues, additional security issues. As well as that, just with the improvements in general other transport and

infrastructure, it has made it more difficult for regional airline operators to develop routes and run them profitably. A lot of it depends on the communities themselves deciding to use the services that these commercial operators make available.

It is a difficult question. We are about to review aviation capacity mechanisms for the Northern Territory. The Chief Minister recently signed off on the terms of reference for a review of our strategy. We will be seeking support through public forums and our discussions and consultations with regional airline operators, but also major airline operators, looking at all the issues that affect that sector of the aviation history. We anticipate coming up with some discussion on that by the end of the year.

Mrs MILLER: It is fair to say that if there is economic growth in the regions it will be more attractive for the airlines to come?

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, very much so, member for Katherine. The opening of the Bootu Creek mine has provided a bit of additional capacity, although a lot of that is going to fly direct to Bootu Creek. However, yes, any population growth in the regions is going to open up potential for regional airlines and other people in the transport sector. We had issues with Airnorth, Vincent Aviation, Aboriginal Air Services and, in Arnhem, Ngukurr Airlines. There have been a number of regional ...

Mrs MILLER: The Aboriginal airlines?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, Aboriginal airlines. We assisted Aboriginal airlines in helping them fund a business development case. That is part of the suite of things that we can do. However, at the end of the day, it is government policy not to provide subsidies, which would be the only other direct way that you could influence those carriers. Work is in progress, but it is one of the top of the mind issues.

Ms CARNEY: Can I just ask a follow-up just on the issue of subsidies?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, sure.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No. Have you finished your line of questioning?

Mrs MILLER: Just one more.

Ms CARNEY: We can share it between us.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, I have to open it up for the whole panel, because that is ...

Ms CARNEY: But that ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Pardon me for a moment ...

Ms CARNEY: No, no, sorry, I just need to ask one. I ...

Mrs MILLER: I will just finish this one. The only thing that concerns me with the regional development boards, is whether anything is going to happen in regional communities outside of the recommendations of these boards, or are you going to rely entirely on the board to look at economic growth in the regional areas?

Mr HENDERSON: No, not at all. When we get on to other areas of departmental outputs and programs, we have business growth programs that businesses, no matter where they are in the Territory, can make applications for. We are providing more information and awareness of those programs throughout the regions of the Northern Territory. Regarding the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, when you look at the 50% of the land in the Territory that is Aboriginal land, we have 13 sectors identified within that strategy that we are looking to work with Aboriginal people to look at investment opportunities through those industry sectors.

It is a pretty small agency; we cannot be all things to all people. The principal source of inputs and drive is going to come through the regional economic committees, but not to the exclusion of individual businesses and sectors. We work specifically with the manufacturing sector, the marine and fisheries sector in the Top End, and mining industry services and supplies. The department does work across industry sectors, as well as business growth programs that are available for any business to apply to.

However, with specific regional opportunities that are focused, the primary source of advice will come through these regional economic committees, but it is not going to be exclusive advice.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. In the interests of time constraints, that is all I have for this output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, how many regional development areas are there now and do they cover the whole of the Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have my wonderful little map here, which has the concentric circles. Essentially, we are starting off with the main regional centres - Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and the East Arnhem region - because most of those regional development boards either had a regional development plan that was in place or one that was very close. We will reshape and refocus regarding specific economic and investment opportunities. The idea of the new economic development committees is to form those committees around communities of interest across the Northern Territory, rather than previously where the boards were aligned along old administrative boundaries.

For example, a discrete area that was serviced by the old Katherine Regional Development Board is the Wadeye/Port Keats/Daly area. That is a community of interest in its own right. I am aware the community of Wadeye, for example, have a couple of specific initiatives that they want to progress, so we will see a regional economic development committee for the Wadeye/Daly region. Another one that used to be serviced - or tried to be through the old Alice Springs Regional Development Board - is the Anmatjere region in Central Australia, which is a community of interest in their own right. If you go across to the western side, the West MacDonnells area, there is a natural community of interest around that West MacDonnells area, as well as more discretely up in the East Arnhem area.

We are looking at communities of interest where, rather than the long geographical boundaries, there are natural communities of interest that we believe fit together. We are not going to mandate. We have identified 12 or 13 across the Territory, but these things are not going to happen overnight. The Anmatjere region, for example, already has a regional development plan, so they will be one of the earlier, more remote regions that will come on line. It is not us as government mandating where these committees may form, but really looking at communities of interest rather than long traditional geographical or administrative boundaries.

Mr WOOD: What I would like to clarify a little is that you have taken over some of the regional development that the Minister for Community Development was looking after?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I presume he was looking at areas that were based on bringing councils together, so you have a strategy which is more based on local government areas. You have now taken over to some extent and said: 'No, we are going to look at that from a regional development position now'. How do they mix? Is there no mix at all? What is the story?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, a good question. In truth - and I would always be truthful to the committee - when the two departments split, we wrestled with that for a while. Essentially, the split is that minister McAdam's department has responsibility for the governance issues - community governance and local government issues. The old Regional Development Offices that focused on governance issues remained in his department. Then, the officers who were in the old CDSCA who were working on economic development came across to this department. There was not a great number, Mike, was there, on the indigenous side that came across, and the regional development staff?

If you look at the two departments, DBERD is focused on regional economic development, and minister McAdam's department is focused on the governance and the local government issues, which still includes looking at bringing local community government councils together in the regions if that is what they want to do. That is how it is split.

Mr WOOD: I suppose what I am trying to get at is there have been lots of boundaries that have dissected the Territory - from ATSIC to some local government, to tourist regions, and you just mentioned Wadeye. For some reason, Wadeye and Daly were in the Katherine region. I lived at Daly for a long time and never regarded myself as part of Katherine - closer to Darwin if anything. There have always been these regions, and some commentators will say a lot of the governance and development issues have fallen

down because these boundaries have never really taken into account the people they are dealing with. We have never really taken into account whether they are of particular tribal, language, pastoral or indigenous groups.

If we are going to start up a group of regional development areas, and we also have local government areas - and I know you said you are not doing your areas on geographical boundaries – was there any talk about whether you would make any attempt to meld the two together? Local government itself is an employee in most places. I am talking here about local government governance, not about local indigenous governance, which is about land management issues. Can you combine the two together in some way which would make it a little more rational or efficient?

Mr HENDERSON: I know where you are coming from, member for Nelson. However, regarding the alignment of local government with regional economic committees, you are aware as well as I am that, if we are going to overhaul the local government structure in the Northern Territory and look at bringing councils together and what have you, those are issues that require an enormous amount of discussion and debate to try to get consensus. I suppose it is just going to be an ongoing issue for the Territory as governance and government structures evolve over time.

We take the view that the priority for my department is to get investment, enterprise and jobs growth happening in the regions. That is what we need to be focused on. The overall strategy, Stronger Regions Stronger Futures, is still the underpinning strategy and, within that strategy, it talked about communities of interest.

We are moving ahead with regional economic committees based on communities of interest that will not be mandated, but will evolve. There are some natural fits. As you said, for the previous Katherine Regional Development Board to have any real capacity to drive individual investment opportunities that there might be in Wadeye or the Daly region, was just unrealistic. There was not representation on the board anyway. The real focus in an ideal world, yes, all the planets would come into alignment and everybody would be working together, and we would all sail off to Nirvana together.

There are some other things that we think we can move quicker than governance and governments, and this is one area. If those planets come into alignment in the future, that is great. However, in the meantime, at Wadeye, for example - and people are probably aware of it - there is a very specific proposal kicking around for a motel development. It makes absolute sense. It should be a no-brainer commercially. Let us get it up and running, and not get bogged down in governance and government issues.

Mr WOOD: I take your point, minister. I know there are lots of issues. You may not necessarily have to amalgamate all councils; some might be quite happy to stay as they are. Would you include councils in these economic forums, or representatives?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes. As part of asking people to nominate, I have written to LGANT and asked for LGANT to ... You have the municipal councils and local community government councils - you know the structures and the history of those things better than I do – and local government, whether they are municipal or community governments, will be part of these committees as they evolve.

Mr WOOD: As many of the issues you will be dealing with will be about land, will you also have people from either the land councils or traditional owners involved?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I am not being prescriptive about that. The previous boards were pretty prescriptive as to who should be on there but, again, horses like horses around the region. All of the land councils have been invited to participate as those various committees evolve. I have had discussions with leaders, and they are keen to participate. It is going to be evolutionary. I am not saying these committees you should have six, 10, or 12 people on them and which organisations should be on them but, in specific remote areas, of course, land councils are the important part of those committees.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, a follow-up question. It is something you raised earlier in relation to regional airlines. You said that it was not a policy of government to provide subsidies. What was the money – I think it was about \$2m - that was provided to Virgin Blue? What was that?

Mr HENDERSON: That was a specific election commitment made prior to the 2001 election after discussions that the party had regarding increasing capacity into Darwin. That was a one-off, specific election commitment in the lead-up to the 2001 election. I think that that funding ran out two or three years ago and it has not been put back on the table. The policy is open skies, no subsidies. However, having said that, the Tourist Commission in particular will work with its marketing budget to have joint cooperative advertising, and commit to marketing and advertising of either existing or new airlines which are seeking to come to the Territory as part of the tourism budget. Mike, do you have anything to add on how that works?

Mr BURGESS: What we aim to do is to establish joint marketing arrangements with new entrants and existing carriers. Those are negotiated on that basis. We are very clear about that.

Ms CARNEY: I am really not sure, but I thought that there was an initial amount of money to Virgin Blue and, then, a couple of years ago there was an extra \$2m or \$4m? No?

Mr HENDERSON: Not to my knowledge. I am pretty confident, Leader of the Opposition, that it was a commitment for two years. How that was chopped up, I would have to go back.

I offer the committee to table the Concentric Circle; the thinking about the communities of interest across the Northern Territory for members who are interested.

Ms CARNEY: Concentric as opposed to eccentric?

Mr HENDERSON: I would never say that, Leader of the Opposition!

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman. I have listened with interest to what you have said in relation to regional development and all of us will keep our fingers crossed that things move and develop in a way that you would also hope and expect, minister. Obviously, particular regions have particular difficulties. In relation to Alice Springs, what do you see as the main difficulties facing Alice Springs? You would know that town is not developing or is not as successful as Darwin when it comes to the issues that you would look at and would want under this portfolio?

Mr HENDERSON: The question being, what are the barriers to economic growth?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, what are the issues for Alice Springs? What makes Alice Springs different to achieving the same economic outcomes that Darwin has, for instance?

Mr HENDERSON: Obviously, Darwin is the capital city and its location as to where we sit in proximity to resources and to the marketplace. It has very specific advantages.

In regard to Alice Springs, I suppose there are a number of issues and opportunities. Access to land for residential and commercial developments and investment has been, and is still currently, a constraint in economic growth in Alice Springs. With the success that the Territory government has had in negotiating the initial land release with Lhere Artepe, and now moving on to looking at the Mt John Valley area, government is confident that the issue of particular access to residential land is something that has been a significant barrier and is being resolved.

One of the key opportunities for Alice Springs is new tourism products in the region. There is Alice Springs, the town itself, but in using Alice Springs as a base to explore the region out through the West MacDonnells, the government proposes to nominate the West MacDonnell Ranges as a world heritage area. The investment in the Mereenie Loop Road to allow for increased capacity for investment in tourism-related facilities along that particular route offers opportunities. Alice Springs, for many years, apart from the convention centre and the casino, has not seen a great deal of new product. Principally with Alice Springs, so much of the economy is dependent on tourism.

There was the initial 'Alice in 10' project listing Alice Springs capacity and capability as a mining service and supply industry. There has been a lot of success in that area. There are issues with the Tanami Road at the moment which need to be worked through. With the increased mineral exploration in the region, for that exploration - as we all know from first seismic through to discovery of the resource, to production - you are talking about a 10-year window. With the increased mineral exploration in the region, you have to think that there are resources out there that are going to be discovered that will be brought to the marketplace over the next few years. There is specific work going on in those areas.

There is the Desert Knowledge Precinct, and we can talk about a bit more when we get to that area. The whole knowledge, economy and attracting investment in research and development - not only in indigenous knowledge, but Alice Springs developing as a centre for research and development in arid areas across a range of industry sectors - offers opportunity. There are constraints and opportunities and we have to work on the opportunities. It is easier to grow existing sectors than develop new, so tourism is, obviously, the low-hanging fruit. I know a lot of work is happening in that area and money is being invested in infrastructure to support that.

The opportunities are going to be there through the mining and resources industry which is going to grow into the future, Desert Knowledge which is occurring, and the pastoral industry as a major sector. We are working with the Central Land Council and the pastoral industry in bringing some of those indigenous pastoral leases back to full capacity and production, which will also offer opportunities. I do not know if I have answered that specifically, but there are issues and opportunities

Ms CARNEY: Constraints and opportunities.

Mr HENDERSON: And constraints.

Ms CARNEY: Such is life.

Mr HENDERSON: That is life.

Ms CARNEY: I am glad you mentioned the issue of a mining services supply centre. The gold mine - was it Newmont, the Tanami?

Mr HENDERSON: Tanami, Newmont.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. It received some recent publicity that it would not use Alice Springs as a supply base because of the road. You raised that as an issue. The question on everyone lips is: what are you, as government, going to do about that?

Mr HENDERSON: You know what I am going to answer: ask the Roads minister. No, I will not say that, Leader of the Opposition. No, I will answer that.

Ms CARNEY: It is significant for regional development.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, absolutely, very much so. Regarding the issue of the Tanami Road – and again I will be corrected if I am wrong - the Territory government has invested approximately \$6m over the first term into that road in extending the seal. My understanding is the total cost of upgrading and sealing that road is in the order of tens of millions of dollars - something like \$70m to \$80m which is - and I stand to be corrected on that – obviously, outside the capacity of the Territory government. I am waiting on a brief from the Roads minister.

I am aware that work is being done in regional development of a proposal to be formulated that would consist of the Territory government, Commonwealth government, and Newmont mine - which is a single mine at the end of that road that is, if you want to say, benefiting from the public infrastructure that has been put in place. An initiative is being worked up to see if we can we get any synergies and, maybe bring the West Australian government into it as well to extend the seal on their side of the border, to see if we can get a significant cross-border partnership between the Commonwealth, Territory governments, Western Australia and Newmont to resolve the issue.

Ms CARNEY: It is a good idea.

Mr HENDERSON: It is beyond the capacity of the Territory government to sink \$70m or \$80m into a single road. I am waiting on a brief back from the Roads minister on that. That is where we are heading.

We did put \$6m in but, at the end of the day, one of the issues is the amount of diesel that is hauled over that road for the mine in very large volumes. I believe the mine outlined a vision to a group of business people in Alice Springs recently, and has been talking about converting to natural gas for energy production at the mine, as opposed to hauling large volumes of diesel which cuts up the roads. If they were not hauling those huge diesel tankers over that road then they would not be cutting it up so much. There is a range of issues there. Through the department and the Roads minister, I believe we are trying to get to a more creative solution to the funding issue than just the Territory government funding the upgrade.

Ms CARNEY: Obviously, it will take some years, even if you can negotiate an agreement - and it is a great idea to involve the Western Australian government. Realistically, it will take some years. Even though Alice Springs is a mining supply base for other mines, this is a fairly significant one. The bottom line is Alice Springs will have to just bide its time for the next few years, realistically. It may be three to five? Would that be a reasonable time frame?

Mr HENDERSON: I cannot put a time on it because, as I said before on a different question, the planets would have to come into a horizon. However, the department is maintaining close links with affected businesses and Newmont. I am not going to talk about Newmont's decisions regarding future investment, but I believe that future investment for a longer life of that mine is pretty good. I have to pay tribute to Newmont; they have been very supportive of using Alice Springs as a regional service and supply centre. Through the department and the department of Mines, we do have a good relationship with them.

It is not an issue that we are ignoring or neglecting; it is being worked through. The department is staying in touch with potential affected businesses and the mines to see what else we can do. I will hand over to Mr Burgess who might have some information.

Mr BURGESS: We have been working fairly closely with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure in recent months about the issue. We think there is real opportunity to have a more creative solution. As is the nature of remote area road networks, they always are vulnerable to the vagaries of the Wet Season and where the rain falls.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps not in Central Australia.

Mr BURGESS: Well, that has been the issue this time round with the Wet Season and the cyclone that went through that area. If it had gone a bit more to the north and across the Western Australian border then, maybe, it would have made supply from Halls Creek impossible and the equation would have been reversed.

Ms CARNEY: You do not ordinarily experience Wet Season factors in Central Australia when it comes to roads or other sorts of development. Surely you are not saying that?

Mr BURGESS: The Stuart Highway gets cut fairly frequently.

Mrs MILLER: I managed to find some water on it, didn't I?

Mr HENDERSON: It was a very sad thing you did, member for Katherine.

Ms CARNEY: This probably leads nicely to the concerns expressed by people in Alice Springs, in particular, the Chairman of the southern branch of the Chamber of Commerce, Terry Lillis. Minister, you would be aware of an article in the *Alice Springs News* on 9 March this year. Front page heading, 'Darwin booms while Alice busts'. There are a number of factors in the article outlined by Mr Lillis as to the reasons why. But he makes the following point, referring to government:

Maybe if they had some more senior bureaucrats in Alice looking at things on behalf of the government, as they did a few years ago, the problem would be taken on board.

That is, the problems Alice Springs is experiencing. My questions are as follows: how many staff do you have in Alice Springs focused on regional development of that area?

Mr HENDERSON: While Mr Burgess is looking for those numbers, in response to Mr Lillis' comments in the *Alice Springs News*, everybody is entitled to their opinion and I respect Mr Lillis' opinion. Yes, Alice Springs has struggled, but there are some fundamentals within that economy that are still very strong, that show a lot of confidence in the future of Alice Springs. One only has to look at the latest Real Estate Institute figures and report that was handed down by them just a few weeks ago that showed strong growth in house prices in Alice Springs and very low vacancy rates.

There certainly are issues in Alice Springs; not only economic issues but also social issues. However, it is good to see that the fundamentals of the economy regarding people having confidence to invest in their own homes for the long term are still very strong. I do not share a doom and gloom opinion about Alice Springs; I am very optimistic. As I have said, there are some significant opportunities that are going to emerge for growth in Alice Springs over the years. I urge everybody who is in this area to actually work on

the positives as well as identifying the negatives and working to resolve those. I hand over to Mr Burgess to identify the staffing situation in Alice Springs.

Mr BURGESS: We have 10 staff in Alice Springs. Three of those are on secondment to Desert Knowledge Australia. To increase our capacity in decision-making and delegation in the area, I have done two things. One is the regional director for the Department of the Chief Minister, John Baskerville, has been invited to be our overall coordinator in Central Australia, and he is given separate funding to assist him to do that. As well as that, I have recently upgraded a position in Alice Springs so that we can create our own regional director position at an executive level to act as our conduit for all matters in the region. We have taken some steps to rebalance our resources into Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: You have a regional director. Was that – no, sorry, I will not ask that. Thank you. Minister, yes, Alice Springs has, I believe, boundless potential. You would have been aware, however, that Mr Lillis, the Chairman of the southern branch of the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce, said in relation to Alice Springs: ‘People are leaving town in big numbers and there are a lot of closed businesses’. The southern Chairman of the Territory’s Chamber of Commerce was not, with respect, voicing his confidence about Alice Springs. Can you explain? Do you think he has it wrong, or do you just agree to disagree?

Mr HENDERSON: I would agree to disagree with Mr Lillis, because you can work off anecdotes or you can work off the facts. I do not have the latest *Real Estate Monitor* here, but I can certainly get it down here very quickly to show that there has been a significant growth in house prices in Alice Springs over the last two to three years, and that growth and trend line is continuing. That does not suggest that there is a lack of demand for housing in Alice Springs and people are leaving in droves. Also, the vacancy rates in the housing and the unit markets in Alice Springs are amongst all time lows. To run the line that people are leaving in droves is not supported by what is happening in the marketplace. There is no doubt that people are leaving Alice Springs for any number of issues. People always have, always will. People come and go for whatever reasons. However, the underlying fundamentals of the marketplace - and it is probably a little old now – through Power and Water connections and disconnections data for power, water, electricity, and motor vehicle registrations - all of those trends that are internal to government - do not show that there is a significant exodus of population from Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: I will make sure I send a copy of the *Hansard* to Mr Lillis.

Mr HENDERSON: I will be happy to discuss it with Mr Lillis any time. Every time I am in Alice Springs, I am happy to have a discussion with Mr Lillis. We do agree to disagree on a number of things. There are anecdotes and there is the marketplace, and I trust the marketplace.

Ms CARNEY: The effect is you trust your indicators of growth in the housing market over the views of a long-standing Alice Springs resident, a senior and successful businessman, and southern Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of the Northern Territory. With respect, I know whose view I would take any day.

Mr HENDERSON: Well that is fine but if Mr Lillis can provide evidence ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that the question?

Ms CARNEY: It is a nice way to finish, Mr Chairman.

Mr HENDERSON: ... of hundreds of people leaving ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It was rounding off?

Ms CARNEY: It was a rounding off statement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have to say that that was a very laid back questioning session. I found it quite comfortable.

Mr HENDERSON: I have taken my happy pills today.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the issue of the state of the Tanami Road raises a number of issues which I wanted to explore. Does the government have some sort of overall philosophy or policy, when it comes to a development which is remote, as to whether it supports that development? How do I put it? If it requires a large amount of taxpayers’ funds to put the infrastructure in? You talked about the mines in the Tanami. Is

that a sustainable development if it requires taxpayers to put in the \$70m to build that road? Would it be fair to say that those companies that wish to develop in some parts of the Territory should put at least something back into the infrastructure so that they are not actually - you could say - being subsidised?

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, member for Nelson. Regarding the capacity within my department as the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development, the key rule that I would run if a commercial operator comes to the Northern Territory government and says they will do something here if we will provide this level of infrastructure or support, is to run a very thorough cost benefit analysis through the whole-of-life costs and benefits of particular proposals. There are economic models that do that. I am not an economist, but we have good people in our department who also look at the multiplier effects in jobs and ancillary sector growth. In the five years we have been in government, there is a lot more robust analysis that goes on now regarding whether government should commit or contribute to infrastructure investment to support private sector investment than probably previously occurred.

The other rigour that we put into it as well, through the procurement process or any other government process, is if the taxpayer is contributing through infrastructure, other areas of support, or it is a direct procurement activity of government to the value of more than \$5m. People are required to bid and provide a local industry participation plan that goes to servicing and supplying the contracts, local training and employment, regional developments and indigenous economic developments. Those commitments are audited through the life of that particular proposal. It is a horses for courses thing. I do not believe the taxpayer should be subsidising industry by the way of provision of infrastructure or in other areas unless it is absolutely necessary. To a large part, that really only occurs if it is significant new green fields investment. It is very hard to provide some support to one business when there are already established businesses working in the marketplace at that level. I am hard pressed to think of any time that we would do that.

A cost benefit analysis is a very rigorous look at it but, fundamentally, the provision of subsidies is not something that is generally available and normally put on the table.

Mr WOOD: If I look at it from another point of view, probably the two biggest users of our roads in the Territory would be the live cattle industry and mining. I know the Cattleman's Association is always raising the issue of upgrading its roads. Does the live cattle industry and the mining industry directly fund to the Northern Territory government in the way of rates, payment for a mining lease or levy on production?

Mr HENDERSON: I cannot be specific as it is really not my department. My understanding is no. I stand corrected, should you ask that question of the minister for primary production. Outside of the normal taxation arrangements that would apply to those businesses that operate in that industry, I am not aware of any specific levies - certainly not rates. We do not apply rates to pastoral properties.

Mr WOOD: If you had a mining company out in the bush, and you have a road that you have to repair to a standard which would help the company, there is no levy – say, on the production of gold - which can go into government funds to develop that road? I will give you an example, which may not exactly be apples and apples.

In Litchfield Shire, a developer is required to provide the council with an infrastructure development levy to help pay for roads away from the development of the subdivision. For every block that is turned off in Litchfield Shire, an amount is paid to the council and the council invests those funds in external infrastructure. I wonder, when there is mining, there is also a responsibility for those mines when it does its financial analysis of whether the thing is profitable or not, to include some money to go directly back into the infrastructure that it requires to make itself successful?

Mr HENDERSON: It is an interesting policy debate. I go back to the minister for DPI and the department who are actually looking at those types of issues right now, particularly in relation to the Tanami. Historically, there has been no such requirement or arrangement that I am aware of. However, as I said before, to expect the Territory taxpayer to pick up the entire \$70m to \$80m for one commercial operator - it may well be that the overall value of that operation to the economy and jobs, and what have you, warrants that. However, there has to be a rigorous cost benefit analysis. It is my belief that the people who are going to ultimately benefit from that investment have to contribute. The mining company would say that they contribute to that through taxation arrangements, royalty payments, and how the Territory government spends their contribution to the tax pool is up to them.

In principle, I agree with what you are saying. We are going to see debate emerge and, hopefully, consensus in regards to the Tanami Road.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: I quickly provide some further information of the real estate market in Alice Springs from the latest March 2006 quarter. House sales year-on-year median price change has seen an increase of 8.5%. Units and flats have seen, year-on-year, an increase of 15.9%. If you look at the trend lines in regard to the residential sales market Darwin versus Alice Springs, you can see Alice Springs tracking pretty close to Darwin. If you look at house sale prices over that time - for Alice Springs in the orange - from September 2001 to where we are today, we have seen significant growth. The same growth is evident for houses. That information is on the public record.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are tabling that, are you, minister?

Mr HENDERSON: It has notes scribbled on it, but it is from the *Real Estate Monitor* March 2006 quarter, which is a public document.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. Are there any further questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Indigenous Economic Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions relating to Output 1.2, Indigenous Economic Development. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you taking over for the member for Katherine, are you?

Ms CARNEY: I am the shadow minister for this. Mrs Miller was doing regional development.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please proceed.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, can you quantify the number of indigenous enterprises that have been assisted by the department in the last financial year?

Mr HENDERSON: Quantify the numbers of indigenous enterprises that have been assisted? The budget papers specifically states in quantity and activities to support development of indigenous business or industry participation, at 65. Specifically, the number of businesses that have been assisted: consultation with individual businesses - 57; consultation with individual stakeholders, industry representatives and government agencies - four; and Indigenous Mining and Enterprise Task Force Forum - three.

Ms CARNEY: Would you mind just repeating the first one you read out – 57. What was the wording?

Mr HENDERSON: Consultation with individual businesses. I can seek additional advice. 2(c)(1) in my program.

Ms CARNEY: 2(c)(1). Oh, here we go. I thought that there was another one there.

Mr HENDERSON: These are specific applications for the Indigenous Business Development Grant program. However, in the numbers of businesses that have been liaised with and consultation has taken place, the answer is 57.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, you have consulted with 57. Good. How many have actually been helped?

Mr HENDERSON: Okay. Well, helped? I would hope all 57. But ...

Ms CARNEY: Received ...

Mr HENDERSON: Okay.

Ms CARNEY: You know what I mean.

Mr HENDERSON: I will take it there.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: We have a specific budget initiative, which was part of last year's budget, the Indigenous Business Development Grant program. That program has a budget of \$300 000 that has been approved for three years, starting in 2005-06. Sixteen applications were approved for the 2005-06 financial year, with a total of \$281 000. The businesses supported to date include a housing repairs and maintenance contractor, a community general store, cultural awareness program, art and craft production businesses, a mobile music business, multimedia production, crocodile tourism business and crocodile husbandry. Best estimate, at this stage, is that the program has created approximately 40 jobs and 10 businesses. That is off a low base. I give an example which is a comparator: the Commonwealth government's program in the listing of remote area exemptions for CDEP has targeted, I believe, 600 new jobs in the Territory this year, and 30 new businesses starting up through the work that they are doing that my department is assisting with. They are talking about 180 jobs have been created, but no businesses specifically through this program. Of course, the Commonwealth's funding bucket is much greater than ours.

We have seen approximately 40 jobs directly generated in 10 businesses, but that is through that particular grant program. In regards to the 57 businesses that the department has been working with, again, that would be at different levels according to those businesses. Not everybody has applied for a grant.

If there is further discussion, I might invite Mr Dennis Bree, who is the executive officer for that part of the department, and maybe hear a bit more information. Dennis?

Ms CARNEY: Well, can I ask the ...

Mr HENDERSON: Well, I will bring Dennis to the table whilst we are on this.

Ms CARNEY: Sure. Can I just check what number of businesses received grants pursuant to or under the indigenous program? How many?

Mr HENDERSON: The value of the grants approved to date is \$281 000 out of the budget allocation, and 10 businesses have been assisted.

Ms CARNEY: Was that \$300 000 per year over three years?

Mr HENDERSON: Over three years, yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. How many of those 10 businesses that received support were new businesses?

Mr HENDERSON: All of those were new businesses.

Ms CARNEY: All of them were new businesses. Okay.

Mr HENDERSON: For clarification, I hand over to Mr Bree who might correct my confusion.

Mr BREE: Dennis Bree, Deputy Chief Executive. There were actually 16 approved applications, of which 10 were new businesses.

Ms CARNEY: Whereabouts were those business based in the Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I hand over to Mr Bree.

Mr BREE: You want them by location in the Territory?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. I do not want their street addresses. There might not be street addresses, but you know what I am trying to find out.

Mr BREE: I will just go through some that I know here and I will get the total later. It is Tree Point, Ali Curung north of Tennant Creek, Stingray Head – do not know there - Katherine region, Daly River, Groote Eylandt. I am afraid I have to get the others for you – there are a number in Darwin.

Ms CARNEY: No, that is okay. That is a good snapshot that they exist pretty much around the Territory. Thank you.

How many other indigenous enterprises over and above the 16 approved applications, 10 of which were new businesses, have received financial or advisory assistance from the department this year?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I hand over to Mr Bree. However, I understand the only ones that have received financial assistance would be through this grant program. Dennis?

Mr BREE: That would be my understanding as well. The others were advisory services.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. That would be the 57 that the minister referred to before?

Mr BREE: Correct.

Mr HENDERSON: Just a point of clarification. There may have been a number of indigenous businesses, and one of the big issues here is identifying what is an indigenous business. Through the department's standards suite of products that are out there such as Business Growth and other programs, there may well have been indigenous businesses that accessed those programs that would not have been captured in this reporting arrangement around this specific program.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I had another question and I have lost it but, if I remember it, you will be the first to know. I move to another question. Are there any plans to provide for inalienable land rights for Aboriginal communities to allow them the opportunity to commercially operate and then benefit from the economic development of their land?

Mr HENDERSON: Can you repeat the question please?

Ms CARNEY: Are there any plans to provide for inalienable land rights to Aboriginal communities which will allow them the opportunity to commercially operate and benefit from the economic development of their land?

Mr HENDERSON: I need some clarification on provision of inalienable land rights by the Territory government to - I am not sure where you are coming from. We have land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* which is inalienable through the very structure of the legislation. I am trying to understand where you are coming from.

Ms CARNEY: Obviously, I need to put it a different way. I thought it was reasonably pretty clear. How is government able to assist Aboriginal people to develop their land so that they can economically benefit from it?

Mr HENDERSON: Okay, probably a number of ways. First, I suppose one of the key things where the Territory government can assist is actually working with potential investors and also through land councils or at a community level where traditional owners, local indigenous people, and land councils might want to see some investment. For example, one of the major investments that has occurred on Aboriginal land over the last few years that is really significantly ramping up now is the Great Southern Plantation investment on the Tiwi Islands, Great Southern Plantations has negotiated a lease with and through the Tiwi Land Council that they have secured some tens of millions of dollars of investment against. Part of their prospectus that they take to the marketplace is that the security that they have in the lease with the traditional owners is the highest form of security. Once the contractual arrangements have been determined between the land council and Great Southern Plantations, and due diligence has been done by both parties, that land that they grow their trees on cannot be sold, encumbered, or traded from underneath them. They see it, in terms of the investments that they do around Australia, as one of the most secure types of investment that they can have.

In regards to other opportunities and things that are happening around at the moment, on Groote Eylandt, the Anindilyakwa Land Council and the traditional owners there are seeking to develop a very significant tourism resort - which blew me away when I was given the presentation of it. I know the local member is pretty proud of it. There are significant opportunities that people are starting to look at around the Territory in developing commercial precincts on Aboriginal land.

We, as the Territory government and through the departments, are looking at providing and working with potential investors and indigenous landowners to identify investment-ready opportunities that people can

invest against. At the moment, people can secure a section 19 lease through the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* with the consent of traditional owners. The current changes that are being made to the act, obviously, will provide - again with consent through the entity that will be put in place - a capacity for private sector and commercial developments where Aboriginal people want that level of commercial development on their land. I see our role very much as a broker in bringing people together and seeing those investments occur.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. You would be working with the Office of Indigenous Policy to achieve the objectives that are outlined in the budget papers under this line item? Correct?

Mr HENDERSON: Well, on a day-to-day basis, my department would work with the Office of Indigenous Policy. However, the main role of the Indigenous Economic Development Unit in the department is actually to implement the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy. I have said many times that government produces a lot of strategies, but this is one of the best one that we have done. It is practical and identifies the 13 key sectors, and we are working at different levels with indigenous people to identify investment opportunities against those sectors. There is an implementation group and a working group, and regular reports are coming back to me, as minister, and, through me, to Cabinet. Regarding policy direction that my department is working through, it is through this strategy that was adopted last year.

Ms CARNEY: Staying on the topic of land for a minute. At the economic summit which occurred in February 2002, a priority action was:

The Office of Indigenous Policy to work with landowners' representatives to further develop and maintain a land use interest register for indigenous land.

Also, this is not huge in terms of how long I will take, but it says:

The Office of Indigenous Policy to negotiate a partnership agreement with land councils, establishing an equitable basis for an extension of economic use of land of the benefit of landowners and the Territory economy.

Can you explain what they mean, and what has been achieved in relation to what were called priority actions?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have that document in front of me, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: But it is ...

Mr HENDERSON: If you are saying the Office of Indigenous Policy was going to negotiate that land use register, I would have to seek advice whether that has been done. The Office of Indigenous Policy sits in the Chief Minister's Department, not in my department.

As I have said, that the main strategic framework that my department is working through to secure economic development, investment, enterprise and jobs growth is the economic development strategy that was released in May last year. I do not have carriage of the Office of Indigenous Policy. Of what they have or have not done since that was released in October 2002, I am not aware.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks. Last night, the Chief Minister who, as you know - and for how long we do not know - is the minister for Indigenous Policy. We talked about indigenous policy, and she was at pains to say it provides strategic policy advice to government. We also talked about the strategic directions document from the Chief Minister's website, which shows the Office of Indigenous Policy and your department apparently working together ...

Mr HENDERSON: We do.

Ms CARNEY: ... to achieve the outcomes that are in this document. Given that on the government paperwork at least, and that the Chief Minister said that the Indigenous Policy Unit is meant to coordinate everything and organise the strategies for everything, why can you not answer the question about whether the Office of Indigenous Policy worked with landowners' representatives to further develop and maintain a land use interest register for indigenous lands? Has the system broken down, perhaps?

Mr HENDERSON: No, I do not believe the system has broken down at all ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, no one knows the answer.

Mr HENDERSON: You are talking about two documents. I can hand over to Mr Burgess or Mr Bree to talk at an operational level about the interface between indigenous policy and my department that is responsible for indigenous economic development. They work closely together. We have been working on issues, particularly under the governmental agreements with the Commonwealth, regarding economic and jobs development. In regard to very specific registers that may or may not have been created, I am unaware. However, we do work with the Office of Indigenous Policy. As I have said before, my department's responsibility is to implement the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, which we are doing. Mr Burgess, I do not know if you have further information we could provide of our relationship with indigenous policy?

Mr BURGESS: There has been activity in this area that I am aware of. I know that through the task force there has been work done with Central Land Council, in particular, to identify areas of interest, particularly for horticultural and agricultural development. I do not have the details of the model, but my Deputy Chief Executive could probably talk to it.

Mr BREE: This has been mainly driven, I have to say, by Centrefarm which is a company owned by the Central Land Council. We and other agencies of government have been working in conjunction with them to get together a portfolio of properties in Central Australia that are suitable for horticulture. They are well on the way to doing that. It has involved the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries, and Mining and ourselves. Essentially, they identified resources that would be suitable such as water, access to land and suitable land, of course, to grow crops. That is the start of, in some ways if you like, a register. It has been done very much by the company Centrefarm. It is a model that we are working with them on and looking at very closely as a model to be expanded to other areas.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, do you have a commitment to improving the economic outcomes for indigenous Territorians?

Mr HENDERSON: There is a very obvious answer to that; that is, yes, and totally.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in the *National Indigenous Times* last week, it said of you in relation to the current leadership unrest within the Australian Labor Party as follows:

Henderson is viewed by many within the party as ambitious and opportunistic with no real understanding or commitment to Aboriginal people.

What do you say to that?

Mr HENDERSON: I ask what that has to do with the budget.

Ms CARNEY: I will tell you everything.

Mr HENDERSON: Please explain.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition ...

Ms CARNEY: I have been asked a question by the minister. I am very happy to answer it. Please let me answer it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, Leader of the Opposition. If you do not believe it is relevant to this particular output, I do not believe it is ...

Ms CARNEY: It is very relevant, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: ... relevant to this particular budget item, then you can call me on that and I will rule if you so like.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, I have been asked a question by the minister. Can I demonstrate, please why this is so, so relevant to this area?

Mr CHAIRMAN: First let us hear from the minister.

Mr HENDERSON: I am not going to comment on an article in the *National Indigenous Times* that is totally ill-informed. I am just not going to comment on it; it is totally ill-informed. I was not asked to provide any comment to that particular article. It is ill-informed, it is subjective and it should not be part of debate on this particular output group.

Ms CARNEY: The reason it is relevant. I note that you will not comment and I understand why.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is no relevance.

Ms CARNEY: Can I just conclude? I do not propose to ask another question ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, there is not a matter of relevance. No.

Ms CARNEY: But it is relevant, because you are the guy standing there saying that you have a commitment. It is clear that there are a lot of people, including the nation's national indigenous newspaper, who do not share your view.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, I will call you to order, please!

Ms CARNEY: Let us move on, Mr Chairman. Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: Where is that paper based, Canberra or something?

Ms CARNEY: What? You do not think it does a good job? Is that what you are saying?

Mr HENDERSON: They obviously do not know what is happening in the Northern Territory. As I said, it is ill-informed.

Ms CARNEY: They do not know what is happening in the Northern Territory? Well, it helped you blokes over the years. The worm turns and you have a different view.

Mr HENDERSON: It is ill-informed.

Ms CARNEY: A bit more work for you to do there, Hendo, before you can become a Chief Minister.

Mr HENDERSON: If they had sought comments, I would have provided a lot of good information.

Ms CARNEY: This is an opportunity to get a greater understanding of Aboriginal people.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I suppose one of the ways to measure the success or otherwise indigenous economic development is how many indigenous people are being employed. I have heard people sometimes say: 'I have gone out to Kakadu and I have never seen an Aboriginal person working on the bus', etcetera. Do you have figures that compare, say, three years ago to now, that show how many indigenous people are being employed in the Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, member for Nelson. It is certainly an issue that I have been trying to grapple with. You have to have a benchmark to know if you are growing and moving in the right direction,. We are working with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to develop better measures, and ABS will recognise that they do not have a good handle on this either. However, in the outcomes that we can identify of job creation across the Territory, I will just go through the information that I have.

At the moment, obviously, the Department of Employment, Education and Training is responsible for education and training across the Territory. As of 5 June 2006, there were 701 indigenous apprentices and trainees across the Northern Territory. That means that 22% of all apprentices and trainees currently in training are indigenous. I do not have the number from three years ago, but I bet London to a brick that that is a very significant increase. Three hundred and twenty people have moved from CDEP to non-CDEP employment by DEWR over the last year. Again, that is through the lifting of remote area exemptions. We are working with DEWR to jointly try and transition people into real jobs.

The Territory public service, something we are in control of, has achieved an overall increase of 55% in the number of indigenous people employed, from 725 when the Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy was launched in November 2002 to the current figure of 1154. It has gone from 725 in 2002 to 1154 currently, an increase of 55%.

The major miners in the Territory - and I have to commend the majority of the miners in our mining industry - are quickly coming to recognise that their workforce predominately can come from remote communities. The major miners in the Territory have collectively increased indigenous employment by about 100. The new grants program that I have just spoken about has seen 40 new jobs created over the last 12 months. There are increases of about 50 in the pastoral industry as a result of the Indigenous Pastoral program, which has been a successful joint venture between the Territory government, DEWR and the Cattlemen's Association. There has been an increase in CDEP positions across the Territory by about 300. If you add all of those numbers up, we are trending upwards. We still have a long way to go but the commitment is there.

I went out to two businesses yesterday with my colleague, the Minister for Housing, looking at how we have to have better strategies and programs, not only to improve housing in the bush but to get better employment outcomes, both in construction and maintenance. The two companies we spoke to yesterday said: 'We would love to do it; how do we start, how do we engage, how do we keep apprentices and trainees engaged?' Through the private sector and the work that has occurred over the last few years, as Bob Dylan said it - I know my colleague, Dr Burns, is a big fan - that the times are a'changin, and businesses are willing to engage and try to do the right thing. We have to focus on employment and training through the department. The Commonwealth is pushing in that direction and the figures are trending up. In regards to whether we have a solid benchmark and a baseline – no, but we are working with ABS to get a better handle on it.

Mr WOOD: Through you, Mr Chairman, I appreciate getting those figures. Can you split those figures up into remote and not so remote. I raise this question because it is the same with education. With numeracy and literacy outcomes, when you split indigenous results into remote and not so remote, you get a completely different result. It is really unemployment in our remote areas for many Aboriginal people, that it is part of the problems we have today with communities that are dysfunctional.

Mr HENDERSON: I do not think that we can. You are quite right; the ABS and census work that we are trying to do is trying to get a better handle on that. The majority of those numbers will probably be in the regional and urban areas. The commitment that the government is making to providing secondary education in the bush, we are starting to see better outcomes there. Much of the focus of regional development is going to be around our regions and indigenous communities. People on communities are starting to say that they want jobs there. They have to be real jobs; people have to be trained. For people to be trained, they have to be educated. The commitment for secondary education is very strong.

I agree, there is more work that needs to be done. We need to have better baseline data. However, I am confident that we are trending in the right direction. Of course, there is always more that could be done, but the focus is there and we are starting to see some good results.

Mr WOOD: I know I have raised this issue about full employment especially in remote Aboriginal communities before. I put it into a context of, yes, you may get a certain number of Aboriginal people employed in mining and certain other developments but, in general, it is going to take a long time to get full employment. Some of these areas simply do not have, at the moment, the capacity to employ all the people who live in those areas.

Do you see a role for the Commonwealth to create jobs in those areas so that people at least have a base to start on? They are not starting from no job or working for the dole, but they are actually working in that area; they are helping the economic development. That way we can have growth, not just coming from a lucky sector, but from the whole community. I keep harping back to the days of the depression in the United States and other places where jobs were literally produced by government so people were not unemployed. Do you see a role for the Commonwealth to come in and fill some of those gaps and make sure people do have jobs at full pay, not CDEP pay?

Mr HENDERSON: I see that the Commonwealth has a very real and major role to play. The Commonwealth still has the primary carriage and responsibility for indigenous affairs in Australia, and housing in the Northern Territory. The new bilateral schedule that we have in regard to the overarching agreements is looking at indigenous employment and economic development. The Commonwealth can always do more. I am not going to sit here today and bag the Commonwealth; that is not what this is about. We have genuinely been trying to work with the Commonwealth to get shared objectives and outcomes in this area, particularly in my area of indigenous economic development.

I am hoping to meet with Kevin Andrews on Friday this week. He is the minister responsible for the CDEP reforms. I have spoken and written to him to say we share the same policy objectives, which is real

jobs with real wages, not CDEP jobs, on communities. There is a whole range of sectors where those jobs can be found. However, there is no magic solution to that. I still live in a spirit of hope that we can continue to work with the Commonwealth to get real job outcomes in the bush. The issue is just too important to play mindless politics with. Yes, there is a significant role there for the Commonwealth. At the end of the day, their capacity to fund infrastructure, improvements to housing, and the service delivery, is far greater than the capacity of the Territory government. We have just to find a way to do it. We have the bilateral agreement, and an economic development schedule. As minister, whilst I have carriage for this portfolio, I hope to have a continued and constructive relationship, as the issue is too important.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes the consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Business and Skilled Migration

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions relating to Output 1.3, Business and Skilled Migration. Are there any questions? Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. There were, but we have police coming up so, in the interest of time, I will skip for my part to the next output area, please.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any members indicating any other intention? Okay. That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

Output 1.4 - Industry Development and Investment

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions relating to Output 1.4, Industry Development and Investment. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No thanks, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I presume - and I hope I am right - that this is the section where the minister puts on his hat for Defence Support? Is that correct?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Mr WOOD: There is no item in here as Defence Support, which is a pity.

Mr HENDERSON: They are in the budget papers, I think, member for Nelson.]

Mr WOOD: It is not down as a separate item.

Mr HENDERSON: I am happy to take questions.

Mr WOOD: That is all right. Minister, the new proposed Defence hub near the Robertson Barracks which, on the surface, is a great idea. I know you have spoken about it in parliament. I did raise some questions in parliament, and I am not sure whether you misunderstood where I was coming from.

I did get approaches from a person representing some of the industries who felt there was a disadvantage that they had set up to do some of this work without any prior knowledge that there was going to be a new site for such work. They had to pay normal rates and operate from another perspective and there is plenty of land still available. They felt that they were, to some extent, disadvantaged by the government deciding to build an industrial hub close to the barracks. Do you think they have a real concern?

Mr HENDERSON: Any business that raises a concern about government activity is of concern to me. I can answer the question. However, I would be more than happy, member for Nelson, for you to tell those businesses that the offer is here if they want to come and talk to me about their concerns. I am more than happy to meet with them and take them through the issues. However, the reality is we can continue to do what we do and miss an opportunity, or we can go after an opportunity. At the end of the day, it was the Commonwealth government that made the decision to purchase 50-odd Abrams tanks to replace the Leopards; it was not the Territory government that made that decision. It was the Commonwealth

government that is doing a major overhaul of a lot of its vehicle fleet over the next five to 10 years. Through their strategic papers regarding improving capability and deploying new platforms, there is a very specific opportunity. It is a window of opportunity that exists now that did not exist one year ago, or two years ago when those businesses may have made an investment in industrial premises. It is not as if this has been on the boil for a number of years now; this is about seizing the moment. The Commonwealth is about to go the tender for the Through Life Support for those Abrams tanks, 41 of which are going to be based here at Robertson Barracks. It gives us the opportunity, for the first time, to secure significant long-term, deep-level maintenance for the Northern Territory.

I have met with all of the probable tenderers for this particular contract over the last few weeks, and I am encouraging those businesses, wherever possible, to seek partnership, joint venture, commercial arrangements, with local Territory suppliers who can assist with delivering on that contract and, through the Northern Territory ICN, have made that facility available. I do not see that any Territory business is going to lose a single dollar out of this initiative, because that work is not currently undertaken here.

Mr WOOD: They were probably putting the question to me of why areas of industrial land that are presently available could not be the hub?

Mr HENDERSON: Through the chair, member for Nelson, the reality is that the commercial land that is currently available in commercial precincts. These are very big tanks. To actually transport them through the commercial areas of Winnellie or Berrimah or elsewhere in Palmerston, through the Yarrowonga estate, it is not going to work! The capacity is to actually have industrial land close or adjacent to the barracks where these significantly-sized vehicles can seamlessly move to and from. The reality is - and with all due respects, I do not know who these businesses are - if it is a small business operating out of the Northern Territory currently in an existing commercially zoned premise, they are not going to be able to bid and win the Through Life Support for 41 Abrams tanks. They would have to move anyway.

I say again, the offer is on the table, very genuinely. If you go back to the people who have been speaking to you, please get them to contact my office. I am more than happy to meet with them and take them through the issues. I am encouraging these major prime potential contractors to look at entering into ventures with local Territory business. We are going to give them every access to those businesses through the Industry Capability Network that the Territory government funds.

Mr WOOD: On another issue, minister. I am not sure where else I can put this, but I will put it under Defence Support Services. Last year, you announced that there was going to be a bus service to the barracks. Not so long after, there were some issues and the bus did not run anymore. It has been put to me by some members of the Defence Force that we are about the only barracks in Australia that does not have a regular public bus service to an area which has about 650 single people - large numbers of people work there every day in the shops and the management areas. Would you consider putting a case to your Minister for Infrastructure and Transport ...

Mr HENDERSON: Buses.

Mr WOOD: Yes, that will do. ... the minister for buses to look at having a regular bus service from Palmerston to the barracks?

Mr HENDERSON: Member for Nelson, I do not have the specific time line, but it was an election commitment to provide a bus service to the people at the barracks. All of our election commitments had funding and the years allocated to them. It was over the term, so I am not sure which particular year. I have a feeling the commitment was for the 2007-08 financial year.

Ms CARNEY: Most of them are, Gerry, 2007-08.

Mr HENDERSON: Ignoring the Leader of the Opposition, we will be engaged with the people at Robertson Barracks about the various routes and schedules that may be required. I am not going to say Robertson to Palmerston or wherever else; that is something that has to be negotiated.

This financial year, my department, through the Defence Support Division, will be putting on the books a new Defence Community Liaison position. At the moment, the department just focuses primarily on the economic and industry issues. However, as a central point of contact for Defence personnel-related issues in regards to the Northern Territory government, we will have that position up and running this year.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I was of the understanding that you made an announcement in parliament last year that we would have a bus service. The bus service you have I think ended up being a minibus service. There must have been some commitment by the government, or was it just that you knew somebody was going to run the bus service and you piggybacked on that and said: 'That is the bus service'? Or are you talking about a public bus service such as the service I have been putting forward today?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, we are talking about a public service. I am unaware of any bus service that existed last year. I am not saying that it did not happen, but I am unaware of whether a private operator tried to make a go of it commercially. I am unaware whether, through the bus minister, Darwin Bus Service as it is called, put one on. However, we are certainly negotiating now. Regarding the route, the schedule, how often it would run, where it would run to, those discussions will take place this year. It was an election commitment and was widely endorsed and supported by the Defence community.

Mr WOOD: On another Defence issue, did you have a Defence open day exhibition at Robertson Barracks or was it at Cairns? An open day?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, the department actually had not so much as an open day - what did we call it? - a welcome to the Territory reception for the 1st Aviation Regiment from Townsville that would be relocating to the Territory when the Tiger helicopters are established here. That occurred last year, coordinated through my department, where the key government agencies of Health, Education and some private sector representatives went over to Townsville and rolled out the red carpet and the welcome mat to the regiment redeploying to the Territory. They talked about government service provision, schools, hospitals, jobs that were available, and the Territory lifestyle. It was very well received at the highest levels. We would certainly be looking to do more of those types of events over the next few years.

There is an element of the unknown and hesitation about being posted to Darwin for the first time; there are a lot of perceptions that are not accurate about the quality of life in the Territory. To send a significant delegation to meet not only the personnel but their families was very well received. As a result of that visit, we have been able to tee up and facilitate and prearrange jobs for a number of people - particularly the spouses who have specific qualifications - before they have even arrived in the Territory. It was a good initiative and it will be built on.

Mr WOOD: What I was trying to raise was that, about two years ago, when there were government departments, community groups, and sporting associations that had a day where people on the barracks, or off the barracks, could come along.

Mr HENDERSON: I remember that one, member for Nelson, because you and I were both there.. That is an open day that is actually facilitated by DCO, Defence Community Organisation. That is actually a Commonwealth open day that we had people at. But that particular open day at the barracks is actually put together and facilitated by the Defence Community Organisation.

Mr WOOD: They are a good day as well.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, very good day.

Mr WOOD: My last question is: with the aviation unit coming to Robertson Barracks along with the Defence hub probably setting up on Thorngate Road, there are traffic issues in that area. It is going to get worse, not better. Is there any move by government to sit down and talk with council and the Defence forces over who is going to maintain these roads or bring them up to a standard that is required, along with things as simple as bicycle paths and other things such as what effect it will have it on Brandt Road, the residential area to the north-east, and whether there are plans for the new entrance to the barracks? Is there anybody in government who is actually helping coordinate all those issues?

Mr HENDERSON: My understanding of the process that will be engaged is that the usual planning processes will apply regarding the land needs to be rezoned. Any development applications will have to go through whatever the consent process is. The usual development approval and consent process will be followed, and all of those issues would have to be addressed through that process.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, but Defence can put an aviation squadron on its own land and there are no planning requirements. They can build *ad infinitum* on their own land and there are no planning requirements. Really, if we are trying to live with our Defence forces in a peaceful way, we need to be coordinating the effects of their growth in that area. That growth does affect people in the Brandt Road, Knuckey Lagoon area. It does affect the wear and tear on Thorngate Road. It does take mining vehicles,

but they are going to disappear in a few years time. However, it will be taking heavy vehicles as they move on and off base. There are a number of issues, yet, it is little old Litchfield Shire up against the Department of Defence which is a pretty big body to try to negotiate with. I am wondering if there is a role for the Northern Territory government and, in your case, minister, for Defence Support to try to negotiate around these issues and be the key leader in future development of the area?

Mr HENDERSON: I will take those concerns on board. We would be seeking to work with all of the stakeholders to get the best possible outcome, not only for industry but also the local community. As I say, the normal planning processes will be followed which, to my understanding, should address most of those concerns.

I suppose the first thing we have to see is, at the moment, we have a concept; we are developing that concept. At the end of the day, these prime contractors might bid Darwin, in which case the whole thing becomes hypothetical. We are having a red hot go to try to attract this industry. It is not going to emerge overnight. However, I will take those concerns on board back through the department. I know departmental officials have already met with a group of local residents who have raised those concerns. Those concerns have been put to me. I will be talking to the Planning minister about them as the concept, hopefully, emerges. I do not want to see local residents disadvantaged and their quality of life disrupted.

Mr WOOD: Minister, just to make that point ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I will ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, I just argue the point. I am not talking about that land *per se*; I am saying most of the development is in the barracks. That does not come under planning. You are adding a little more to the equation which we have some control over. That is all I am trying to say. Sorry, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, I think we did stray out of the budget context in that.

Mr WOOD: No, it is the only place the Minister for Defence Support can be questioned. If you can show me where else, I will agree with you.

Ms CARNEY: I think he is inviting you to show him where to put it, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No, no, I would not be that rude.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other wide-ranging budget-related questions in regard to this output?

Mr HENDERSON: It is a very diverse department.

Mr WOOD: It is, indeed.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of output 1.4, Industry Development and Investment.

Output 1.5 - Business Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions related to Output 1.5, Business Development. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes thank you, Mr Chairman. I had a few but, again in the interest of time, I just want to ask a couple. We debated - we did not actually debate it, we talked about it in the parliament last week - the announcement by the Attorney-General under his portfolio of Consumer Affairs that charges would be laid for business name registrations, breaking a decade - I think it was 1997 when Shane Stone was Chief Minister who came up with it - of policy that no Territory business would be charged for registering their business name. I thought your government agreed that that was a quite innovative policy direction for business. Minister, what is your reason for this change, and what is the reason for it in your view? Clearly, I am asking you this in this output area for obvious reasons.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. The policy rationale - and at the time anything you could do to reduce costs for business, I suppose, is something to aspire to so that businesses can then return that reduction in costs into building their business and investing in jobs. The issue of the business names register was pretty simple. I do not have the numbers of how many businesses were on the

register - it is not really within my portfolio - but what we were seeing was that there were significantly more businesses that were registered in the register than were operational, and that number is significant in the thousands.

What was starting to emerge was an increasing number of complaints coming to government where businesses which were operating in a particular and specific niche area or sector would be registering every plausible and thinkable name that would reference the particular business they were in. I will take for example - and this is not a specific example - a tourism business that may be focused at doing tourism at Litchfield. Increasingly, a number of businesses would register every combination of names that included Litchfield, tourism, charter and whatever their business was, that would prevent somebody from setting up in competition to them with a business name that actually indicated what they did. We were receiving significantly increasing numbers of complaints about the misuse of this register in blocking business names that might otherwise have been available, but would indicate a large part of your business name - which is to say who it is and what you do and where you do it - to businesses that would seek to set up in competition. It was being misused.

In regard to how do you address that - and, obviously, we are never going to have enough public servants to audit businesses to see if they are trading or not trading - was to reintroduce a fee that, at least if you are going to play that game it is going to cost you some money. Hopefully, it should be a disincentive for people to register significant numbers of names that they are never actually going to use.

That is the policy rationale for doing it. I have just been advised the registration costs are \$60 for three years. All of the costings in determining what we were going to charge have just been based on cost recovery - this is not a revenue-raising exercise. It is the lowest charge that applies anywhere across the states and territories, and has been put in place as a measure to stop people misusing the register to try to block out competition. It is not a revenue-raising exercise; it is cost neutral and the costs are less than any other jurisdiction.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for that answer, but it raises a couple of other issues. How do you, either as minister or government, know what steps were undertaken to ask those businesses that owned the business names whether or not they were going to use them at some point in the future?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not the minister for this area but I have discussed it with the minister. When you receive complaints that people cannot register a business name because every combination of those words have been registered, you go back to the register and see significant numbers and, in some cases, dozens of names registered around that entity. When cursory investigations around those complaints show that a number of those entities are not trading, then a problem has emerged. I do not have the numbers in front of me but I think it was something like 22 000 ...

Ms Carney: 20 000.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, 22 000 were registered as of June 2004, and the figure comprised of what we estimated was 16 600 non-employing businesses - 75% of the total. You have to ask why these businesses are registered? Why should the taxpayer bare the cost of maintaining the register for 16 000 businesses that are not trading or employing anybody, engaged in no commercial activity whatsoever, with a large number of those acting as a blocker to somebody wanting to register a business to actually engage in meaningful business activities? That was why the measure was put in place. At \$60 for registering a new name and \$50 over three years for renewals, it is less than what the cost was prior to the 1997 election decision to scrap the fee. At that time, the cost of registering a business was \$85. As Business minister, I took a keen interest as the fees were developed, as you would expect me to do.

However, this is not a revenue-raising measure; it just recovers costs. In costs that apply to businesses anywhere else in Australia, it is less than anywhere else in Australia, like a lot of our fees and charges. I do not think it is a barrier from anybody establishing a business or keeping one running. At \$60, I would rather we did not do it. However, when you have 75% of businesses on the register not trading, hopefully, it will clean a lot of those out.

Ms CARNEY: It is hard to thank you for your answer because, in it, you did not answer my very specific question and you raised two others. I will repeat the original question: how do you, or government, know the owners of those business names are not going to use them? Secondly, you referred to some businesses owning dozens of names. How many own dozens of names? Thirdly, you referred to why the taxpayer should bear the responsibility, or the burden, of maintaining a register. That register is maintained in any event. Can you answer those three questions, please?

Mr HENDERSON: I will do them to the best I can. I do not know how many businesses owned dozens of names. That was an issue that you might have raised with the minister who is responsible for the register.

However, there is no doubt that we were receiving increasing numbers of complaints from *bona fide* potential business operators who were looking to start up a business and register their name that identified who they are, what they do, and where they do it, and could not do it because of every permutation of those names being registered.

I applaud the policy attempt. I read Shane Stone's letter in the paper on Saturday, and saw him at a function on Saturday night. The intent of the decision at the time was good. However, like a lot of decisions that you make, people will find a way of abusing the system. There is no doubt in my mind, as Business minister, that that register was being abused by a number of people in an anti-competitive way. Establishing a very small fee to register a business name, hopefully, will be one way of cleaning out the register to allow *bona fide* businesses which are looking to trade and to employ, to be able to establish themselves in a marketplace to identify who they are and what they do. At the time, the register was impacting on the capacity to do that.

Ms CARNEY: You still have not answered my question. How do you know that those business names are not going to be used? What is the basis for you, as Business minister, forming the view that those names will not be used by their owners at some point in the future?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will just make the observation, minister, that this is the third time ...

Ms CARNEY: Yes, it is the third time I have asked the question, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is getting repetitive. I will rule on repetition shortly.

Mr HENDERSON: As I said, I am not the minister for the register. However, the advice that I had was, an investigation was made of a number of complaints that were received both by me as minister for Business and also the minister for licensing. Investigations occurred around some of these names. It very clearly identified that numbers of businesses that were registered, in significant numbers, were not trading. How you can then ask what I did to satisfy myself that, at some point in the future, a business that is not trading may trade - well, I do not have a crystal ball. The reality is that the capacity to freely register a business name to block out your competition is not a practice that I would have thought any government who is trying to support investment, enterprise and jobs growth would allow to continue as an anti-competitive measure.

Of course, I cannot say that a business that is not operating today may operate at some stage in the future. Well, fine. When you are going to operate the business, register, pay the fee and you will be allowed to operate. Why should you be allowed to have that name on the register for year after year after year, blocking the opportunity of somebody to register under that name and trade? I fail to see where you have sympathy for people who were block registering large numbers of names to block out the competition. It is certainly not in the spirit of enterprise, a market economy and free competition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for that speech, minister, and please do not beg the question. You and your colleague, the Minister for Justice and Attorney-General, have said in the parliament - and this is the parliament - that such a significant change is necessary. I am trying to find out whether, in fact, it is necessary and whether the steps taken and statements made by you, as captain of the business ship - although there may well be another promotion for you in due course - that this change is necessary, are necessary. On the basis of what you have said, it is difficult to see why there was a compelling reason. You said you have received complaints,. How many? How many complaints did you receive that changed government policy - both governments that existed from 1997?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have specifically the number of complaints. However, in the analysis that was done, of the 22 000-odd names that were registered, 17 000-odd of those names were not trading, which is a very significant number and demanded a policy response. That is the answer.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. You have said that ...

Mr HENDERSON: I also supplement that saying that the introduction of a \$60 fee, which is the lowest of all states - particularly when we have a taxing environment where businesses with 100 employees or less are taxed lower than any other jurisdiction - is not a significant change.

Ms CARNEY: You said in an earlier answer that you regarded it as anti-competitive for a business owner to hang on to some business names. If you feel so strongly about that, do you think that charging a business \$60 a pop to hang on to the business name in order to maintain a competitive advantage, which may range from thousands to hundreds of thousands or, indeed, millions of dollars, is going to do the trick?

Mr HENDERSON: Well, I suppose we will have to wait and see. In regard to some entities that did have some significant dozens of permutations of names, I would have thought that, maybe, when they are stuck at \$60 each for 70 or 80 permutations of a name, they are going to think twice about it. However, we will wait and see how many businesses cease to register once the fees start to climb.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: No, I will leave it there thanks, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on this output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.5, Business Development.

Output 1.6 – Innovation and Knowledge Economy

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions relating to Output 1.6, Innovation and Knowledge Economy. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No thanks, Mr Chairman, due to time constraints.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.6, Innovation and Knowledge Economy.

Output 1.7 – Industry and Economic Policy

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions relating to Output 1.7, Industry and Economic Policy. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Due to time constraints, Mr Chairman, no.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0, Economic Development.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any non-output specific budget related questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you provide details - you may have it in table form - of the number of staff in the department and the levels at which they are employed, including full-time equivalent, etcetera?

Mr HENDERSON: I am sure we will be able to do that. We have full-time actual number of staff, but not down to individual levels, so if you want that at individual levels, we can probably take that on notice and get it to you.

Ms CARNEY: Sure. You obviously have a document there. We ask this question every year, would you be happy to table that?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, but it does not show the levels, that is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, do you want to follow up with a question on notice first?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you. Shall we table that document first so that it is in and then I ask the questions about the levels?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, it is tabled now.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, okay.

Mr HENDERSON: So you want this tabled?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, can you please restate that question for *Hansard*.

Ms CARNEY: In addition to the documents tabled regarding staff in the department, could you also provide the levels at which departmental officers are employed?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you take that question on notice minister?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I allocate No 5.2 to that question.

Ms CARNEY: Is there a media unit or communications unit operational in the department, minister?

Mr HENDERSON: I will hand over to my chief executive officer.

Mr BURGESS: Yes, we have a Corporate Communications Unit in the department.

Ms CARNEY: How many people are employed in that department?

Mr BURGESS: Eight.

Ms CARNEY: Eight?

Mr BURGESS: Eight.

Ms CARNEY: At what levels?

Mr BURGESS: We will provide that in response to the previous question on notice.

Ms CARNEY: If you do not mind, I would like to ask it separately unless you can guarantee they will be separately identified in the answer to the question.

Mr BURGESS: Yes, we will.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suggest that you do ask it on notice. Would you take that question on notice?

Mr HENDERSON: Happily.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you.

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, please restate that question.

Ms CARNEY: In relation to the communications unit inside the department, could you provide details of the level at which those eight people in that unit are employed?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you take that question on notice?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I allocate that question as No 5.3.

Ms CARNEY: What do the eight people inside the communications unit of the department do?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Burgess.

Mr BURGESS: They are responsible for managing the communications and information management on behalf of the department. That comes down to organising all our advertising and our show displays, and assisting our business units to develop presentations to different industry groups. All that activity is channelled through that area.

Ms CARNEY: You have said that it organises advertising. What sort of advertising? Radio and television?

Mr BURGESS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Newspaper?

Mr BURGESS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Who pays for that advertising?

Mr BURGESS: In next year's budget it will be consolidated in that group. At this point, the payment has come from the individual business units as well as centrally from the corporate communications group. That is just due to a factor of very many bits and pieces coming together in this year.

Ms CARNEY: Is another way of putting it - that last year and next year the department will pay for the advertising?

Mr BURGESS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Does any of the newspaper advertising undertaken by the department that you have referred to include photographs of the minister?

Mr BURGESS: I do not believe newspaper advertising does. We always ensure that any advertising or public documentation that we do is checked through with the protocol that is in place, established by the Department of the Chief Minister, for advertising in relation to government policy. We always make sure that we do it in accordance with that.

Ms CARNEY: So, there is a protocol document in existence that governs the sort of advertising that your media unit and other communications units in other departments do?

Mr BURGESS: We always check with the communications unit in the Department of Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, but you referred to a protocol. Is there a document in existence with guidelines that sort of thing? There would have to be, wouldn't there?

Mr BURGESS: I have to seek advice on that. I do not personally do it, so I have to seek advice.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps I will ask it this way: is there a document detailing the protocols for departmental spending in the communications unit of your department?

Mr BURGESS: I am not aware of one that dictates departmental spending. What I am aware of is guidance around presentation.

Ms CARNEY: You are aware of a document that you previously referred to as a protocol, that has in it guidelines as to presentation of advertising? Correct?

Mr BURGESS: It has guidelines and terms of layout, format, templates ...

Ms CARNEY: Contents?

Mr BURGESS: Content? No, I do not believe so.

Ms CARNEY: There is, nevertheless, a document in existence? Correct?

Mr BURGESS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. You do not need to, with respect, look sideways at the minister to check that it is okay. We expect all the senior public servants to answer the questions in the appropriate way. I am wondering, minister, in light of the existence of that document, whether you would table it?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have the document, so ...

Ms CARNEY: Oh, where is it?

Mr HENDERSON: My chief executive has just said there is a document available through the Protocol Unit of the Chief Minister's Department. It is not a document that I have or my department has.

Ms CARNEY: The document, with respect, you do have because your CEO uses it on a daily basis, as do his 10 people in the Corporate Communications Unit.

Mr HENDERSON: No ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, no, no. Leader of the Opposition! You can dig around for information and that is fine. However, I do not recollect the CEO saying that he uses it every day. By all means ask questions, but please do not put words into people's mouths that they clearly did not say. A little respect for the people over there goes a long way.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for that lecture, Mr Chairman. I will see if I can be more specific.

Minister, your CEO has said that he is aware of a document that exists that prescribes guidelines as to the advertising that the Corporate Communications Unit undertakes in your department. Do you have a copy of that document because I believe Territorians should see it? Why will you not table it if you do have a copy?

Mr HENDERSON: The answer is no, I do not have a copy, therefore, I cannot table it.

Ms CARNEY: Who does have the copy?

Mr HENDERSON: I have no idea who has the copy.

Ms CARNEY: But you know so much about everything, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: No, I do not.

Ms CARNEY: Right. I note and understand your reluctance to 'fess up on that one. Do the staff of the Corporate Communications Unit transcribe media interviews with politicians?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Burgess.

Mr BURGESS: We occasionally avail ourselves of transcription services, but I do not recall any instances where we have transcribed ...

Ms CARNEY: Can you finish the sentence?

Mr BURGESS: Where we transcribe the discussions.

Ms CARNEY: Let us go back. Does the Corporate Communications Unit type up interviews of politicians?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, that is an operational question. I would be very surprised. There are transcription services available that everybody can access if you want a transcript of a particular media interview. I would not have thought we would have public servants sitting there with headphones on taking transcripts. I might be wrong.

Ms CARNEY: No, I would not have thought that either but ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister is responding. Are you directing it at ...

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, I am just trying to be open and honest here. I would find it a surprise if we did.

Ms CARNEY: So the catchphrase goes. Do you want to add? Sorry, is that the answer? Okay.

Your CEO said that the communications unit did undertake transcription services. What is the nature of those transcription services?

Mr HENDERSON: No, no, no! I can appreciate and totally respect your position to have a go at me. However, do not put words into public servant's mouths. What my chief executive has said ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order, Mr Chairman!

Mr HENDERSON: What my CEO said ...

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman! A point of order! I did not put any words into his mouth. He said there were transcription services undertaken.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No.

Mr HENDERSON: No, no.

Ms CARNEY: Do not go begging the question again.

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment please, minister. Leader of the Opposition, I have chipped you before on this.

Ms CARNEY: You have, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, and the minister has picked up on it too. There is no point of order. Please carry on, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: I am absolutely confident - and we will get back to the *Hansard* record - my chief executive said that, on occasions, the department would avail themselves of transcription services. He did not say that they undertook transcription services. You would know that there are commercial entities out there that, for a fee, will provide a transcript of any media interview that is in the public domain. On occasion, the department, as advised by my chief executive, avail themselves of those services. He did not say that they transcribe services within the departments.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I know that there are media monitoring places around, and governments and oppositions use them from time to time. What we do not want to see is public servants typing up what are political interviews. Can you assure me that in your department, in the Corporate Communications Unit, which employs eight people, that that does not and has not ever occurred?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is that that has never occurred, and does not occur.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. That was not hard.

Mr HENDERSON: No, it was not, so I do not know why you did not listen in the first instance.

Ms CARNEY: Well, stop begging the question. Thanks, Mr Chairman. I think that is enough for the - oh, no, sorry, one more question. Minister, can you list what reviews are presently being undertaken by your department?

Mr HENDERSON: Just bear with me, Leader of the Opposition. Okay. Currently, we have a delegation review occurring - an internal departmental review of delegations and the appropriateness of those; we have a consultancy through Risk Management Services to evaluate the effectiveness of internal control systems within Territory Discoveries ...

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman. Sorry, minister, can I just interrupt you? You are obviously reading from a document. Are you happy to table that document if it is a list? Presumably it was prepared for that purpose.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, there are three others, but there is only one, two, three, four currently under review.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, if you would be good enough to table that? Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: And does the tabling of ...

Mr HENDERSON: Three out of those four are internal departmental.

Ms CARNEY: Is the review that your CEO referred to some time ago in relation to economic development and airline capacity on that list?

Mr BURGESS: That has not commenced yet.

Ms CARNEY: Right, so the Chief has signed off on it but it has not come into being?

Mr BURGESS: Yes, that is correct.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Does that tabled document provide any list of the end date for those reviews?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not know. It has been taken off me.

Ms CARNEY: Well, presumably you had two copies?

Mr BURGESS: No, that document does not indicate the end dates, but they will be completed this financial year.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr HENDERSON: I have information here that goes to the delegations by output group for the departments. That was a question that has been provided.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Delegations, was it?

Mr HENDERSON: Not delegations, sorry, classifications. Yes. It is not ready to table, I am advised, so we will get it down later this afternoon.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you for your effort to be so punctual. All right. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers who provided advice to the Minister for Business, Economic and Regional Development today.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to the Land Development Corporation.

Mr HENDERSON: Can I just advise the committee that the CEO of the Land Development Corporation is Mr Trevor Dalton who will be assisting me with any committee questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is everyone settled over your side, minister?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I believe so.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right then. I welcome the Minister for Business, Economic and Regional Development and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Land Development Corporation.

Mr HENDERSON: In the spirit of expediting proceedings, I will not be making an opening statement. As I said, the Chief Executive of the Land Development Corporation, Mr Trevor Dalton, is at the table with me and happy to take any questions on the LDC.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 - INDUSTRIAL LAND DEVELOPMENT
Output 2.1 - Industrial Land Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to Land Development Corporation. I will now call for questions relating to Output Group 2.0, Industrial Land Development, Output 2.1, Industrial Land Development. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Not at this stage, Mr Chairman, although I know Mr Wood has some.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman, just a number of questions. Is the Darwin Business Park the old TDZ, or is it larger than that?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have a map here, but it is the old TDZ. The majority of the land at East Arm is Crown land, Territory government land, that has been vested in the Land Development Corporation. I am not sure that we have a map. If we do not have a map, we can make one available to you.

Mr WOOD: No, I have a good idea.

Mr HENDERSON: We will get you a map.

Mr WOOD: All right, get a map. I do not want to put that on notice.

Mr HENDERSON: We will get you a map. I will make sure it happens.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. How far has the development of the Darwin Business Park gone? Is there still more work to be done in developing it or has it been completed?

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, no, I believe we have released or we actually have commercial arrangements in place for about 50% of the land. There are, obviously, applications for the land with the LDC, which acts as a statutory entity in its own right with a board and deals with land on a commercial basis. I will hand over to Trevor who can give you a quick overview of where we are and where we are going.

Mr DALTON: Trevor Dalton, General Manager, Land Development Corporation. The Darwin Business Park is, in general terms, subdivided parcels of land at East Arm and incorporates the new subdivision that includes the Toll, FreightLink, passenger terminal and some other land including the Darwin industry fuel terminal, as well as the former Trade Development Zone.

There is quite a large amount of additional land at East Arm currently under the ownership of the Northern Territory government and controlled by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. The answer to the question is the majority of the land in the Darwin Business Park has been subdivided, levelled, and has individual lots subdivided out of it. There is more to go.

Mr WOOD: Is there an area set aside specifically just for rail freight, as distinct from other industry?

Mr DALTON: Yes, there is. In particular, that is the area between the Darwin passenger terminal, the FreightLink freight terminal and the Vopak Darwin industry fuel terminal, and adjoins the rail corridor.

Mr WOOD: My other question is related to budget highlights speaking about a maritime industrial precinct. I have never heard of a maritime industrial precinct. Is this some new precinct or has it been on the cards for some time? Where exactly is it?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I will defer to Trevor Dalton. There is some work going on across government agencies to look at the potential opportunities for a maritime precinct at East Arm. Mr Dalton.

Mr DALTON: Yes, work is going on across agencies, in particular, the main DBERD areas of Department of Planning and Infrastructure and the Land Development Corporation. At the request of

business, we are considering various areas for development for industrial purposes that front, or have the potential for fronting, on to the waterfront, with reclamation of sea walls. What is required varies in different spots along the East Arm foreshore.

The purposes are, once again, varied but, in general terms, for ship repairs and maintenance, support and supply base for offshore oil and gas bases, and general supplementary maritime services for fishing fleets and recreation boats.

Mr WOOD: Does the public have any input into how this area is planned? The hill at East Arm was cleared and land was developed. Occasionally, you will hear of an odd business getting planning approval. However, is the overall development of that area basically all been agreed to years ago and you are just doing the infill? Can the public have a say in what is happening in that development?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, before I hand over to Mr Dalton, there is some form of East Arm master plan in place that is being reviewed at the moment. At the end of the day, the outcomes that we are looking for is the release of land in a commercial way that is going to support the operation of the railway, the port, and associated activities. There is a development plan review that is under way. Again, Mr Dalton might have more information.

Mr DALTON: Not really a great deal to add to that. In general terms, the master plan is being updated. The Minister for Planning and Lands is the Consent Authority for the East Arm area, which incorporates, as I said earlier, the Darwin Business Park specifically, a variety of vacant Crown land, and a number of freehold and leasehold privately-owned parcels. The minister is also advised by the East Arm Development Group. In the make-up of that advisory body is a variety of public servants, and they take advice from specific consultants in studies in town planning and engineering consultancies.

Mr WOOD: Would it be fair to say that the public does not really have any input as it would into Litchfield Shire or Darwin? You have this area in the middle, and it is, basically, run by public servants and consultants. We are planning an area that has lots of potential. It is going to be an industrial area right in the middle of our harbour, yet the public do not seem to be involved in the planning processes of this area.

Mr HENDERSON: Again, the details of the planning process and how the Minister for Planning and Lands is the consent authority for that area, how he operates under what planning guidelines regarding public input, with all due respect, if you refer those questions to him, he will be able to give you a much more detailed answer than I would be able to.

Mr WOOD: Just one other question. Under the operating statement, it says that you have purchases of goods and services - \$1.23m. What sort of goods and services are to be purchased?

Mr HENDERSON: I refer that question to Mr Dalton.

Mr DALTON: I do not have that figure in front of me at the moment, but it would be a mixture of, I believe, salaries for staff, and consultancies in engineering and town planning studies.

Mr WOOD: The employee expenses are a separate item - \$595 000.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you refer it to a page of the ...

Mr WOOD: Page 137 – the operating statement for the Land Development Corporation.

Mr HENDERSON: We are just taking advice, bear with us for a second. Okay, I might hand over to Ms Tracey Scott, who is the Chief Financial Officer who might be able to provide detail there.

Ms SCOTT: Tracey Scott, Chief Financial Officer. The purchase of goods and services mainly relate to repairs and maintenance and operational costs in developing the land ready for sale.

Mr WOOD: Oh, I see. You have to do that as part of the role of the Land Development Corporation?

Ms SCOTT: Absolutely.

Mr DALTON: I could add to that. That includes subdivision servicing, road works, extension of water and sewer, and we also do that for improved properties, for buildings where there is ongoing maintenance and repairs and upgrades to those buildings.

Mr WOOD: Just one last question for clarification. This item is called Industrial Land Development. What has happened to the part of the Land Corporation that is not industrial? They own other land that is not industrial. We used to have the Land Corporation.

Mr BURGESS: It is still on Northern Territory Land Corporation, but that is a separate entity to the Land Development Corporation. Separate entities.

Mr WOOD: Oh, right. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions related to this output?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman. There seems to have been a significant revaluing of the assets. If you look at Budget Paper No 3 2005-06, at page 264, it appears to be a re-evaluation of assets. The total equity budget for 2005-06 was \$37.995m. One year later, the budget for 2006-07 total equity was \$66m. Can you explain why that is?

Mr WOOD: Could I have the page, please, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, 2006-07 budget, page 138.

Mr HENDERSON: Just bear with me while I get advice on that, Leader of the Opposition. My advice is that over the financial year there was \$15m worth of capital works that came on board through DPI. Mr Dalton, I do not know if you have any further information.

Mr DALTON: Yes, that is correct. I guess the easiest way to explain that is the work that was carried out by DPI on behalf of the Land Development Corporation. It is transferred to reflect that.

Ms CARNEY: So, a \$15m capital works project represents the difference between equity of say \$38m to \$66m? That is the sole factor, is it?

Mr DALTON: I can partly answer that in that, yes, there was a revaluation, coming back to your earlier question, of the land and buildings that were mentioned before. My understanding is that the majority of it was the actual works carried out on our behalf.

Ms CARNEY: When did the revaluation take place? How long ago?

Mr DALTON: 1 July 2005.

Ms CARNEY: Is it the case that the revaluation amount makes up for the shortfall when you factor in \$15m for capital works from \$38m in 2005-06 to \$66m in 2006-07, so it all adds up?

Mr DALTON: Yes, I believe that is correct.

Ms CARNEY: There were no new properties acquired during that time?

Mr DALTON: No, I do not believe there were any properties acquired. We have the ability to acquire properties in the private market or from the Commonwealth or another party. All of the land we have acquired or obtained at this stage has been Crown land that has been transferred from the Northern Territory government or, initially when we set up, from the Trade Development Zone Authority. None of the new parcels that were acquired have taken place this financial year.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Chairman, there was a question I took on notice regarding the levels of the eight staff of the marketing and communications unit. I have tabled that response.

Mr CHAIRMAN: My record indicates that was question No 5.3. I hope I am right on that one.

On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the officers who have provided advice and the Minister for Business and Economic Development today.

Minister, I am feeling pretty generous with my time. Would you like two minutes?

Mr HENDERSON: I would love two minutes, thank you.

The committee suspended.

NORTHERN TERRITORY POLICE, FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now invite the minister to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman, I would like to make a brief opening statement in relation to my portfolio of Police, Fire and Emergency Services. First, I would like to introduce Police Commissioner, Paul White; Director of Fire and Emergency Services, Bruce Mouatt, who will join us when we get to Fire and Emergency Services; Audrey Ko, who is the Executive Director, Corporate Services; and Rose Hallett, Director of Finance and Procurement.

Budget 2006-07 delivers another year of record funding to Police, Fire and Emergency Services as the government continues to build a new era in the Territory policing. Funding for Police, Fire and Emergency Services have been boosted to \$212m, a 55% increase since the Martin government came to office in 2001-02. The majority of the increase will fund extra police on the beat across the Territory and the final year of the government's \$75m Building Our Police Force plan. \$32m will be allocated to continuing to build a new era in Territory policing as we work towards an extra 200 police on the beat by the end of this year.

Other features of the Building Our Police Force plan in budget 2006-07 include establishing dedicated traffic branches in Alice Springs and Darwin. I am pleased to announce today that Northern Territory Police will begin establishing these branches from 1 July this year. They will be staffed by 12 constables across both Darwin and Alice Springs branches, and will focus on enforcement, providing increased capacity to develop, implement and promote educational road safety programs aimed at reducing the incidences of trauma on our roads. Other highlights include a new 7.4 m coastal vessel, which will also be purchased for Ngukurr Police Station from funding; the last boat to be delivered by the government's \$1m coastal vessel replacement program.

As part of the 2005 EBA with police, government has now allocated an extra \$12.2m in funding towards the agreements improving pay and working conditions for our police officers. This follows an allocation of \$9.3m in 2005-06. \$630 000 has been allocated to the new social order patrols introduced as part of the government's package of measures to break the cycle of alcohol abuse, violence and antisocial behaviour. \$440 000 has been allocated to Stage 2 of an initiative to provide Aboriginal Community Police Officers working in remote communities, with police-owned vehicles to carry out their duties. Budget 2006-07 continues government's emphasis on counterterrorism initiatives to ensure the Territory maintains its capacity to respond to incidents effectively and efficiently. Funding in 2006-07 includes \$760 000 for the purchase, maintenance and replacement of equipment and the provision of training to develop an urban search and rescue capability.

The budget also includes: \$110 000 in Neighbourhood Watch grants to assist community-based crime prevention programs aimed at the protection of property and personal safety; \$1.76m in juvenile diversionary program grant funding ongoing; \$500 000 to continue the implementation of the fire service review recommendations to address management and workplace issues including industrial relations, human resource management, and staff development in the Fire and Rescue Services; and extra funding of \$560 000 for the upgrade of the NT Fire Alarm system transmission and the provision of extra technical support.

Police will also continue to implement targeted strategies to reduce the rate of personal and domestic violence in the Territory and target drug-related crime.

Budget 2006-07 is building the Territory's future, and the government is pleased to again deliver record levels of funding to support safe communities. I am happy to take questions from the committee.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions in regard to the opening statement?

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME PREVENTION
Output 1.1 - Community Safety and Crime Prevention

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Community Safety and Crime Prevention, Output 1.1, Community Safety and Crime Prevention. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thanks, Mr Chairman. Welcome, Commissioner and his colleagues.

Minister, you announced a week or so ago that Alice Springs would at long last receive the mobile police station. When is it actually going to get there and be operational?

Mr HENDERSON: I am advised July.

Ms CARNEY: This year?

Mr HENDERSON: Absolutely. I saw it with my own eyes.

Ms CARNEY: Just checking.

Mr HENDERSON: Absolutely.

Ms CARNEY: I know you saw it, but there are a whole bunch of people in Alice Springs who have not. So, July this year. Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: They will be seeing it and they will be very pleased.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, you assured them that they would. Was a mobile police station promised for Katherine during the election or, indeed, at any other time?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, the announcement was the government has provided \$400 000 for four mobile police stations. There will be a mobile police station for Alice Springs, one for Darwin and one which will be allocated to Katherine. The fourth vehicle we are going to wait and see how these vehicles go, but police are looking at a slightly larger unit to accommodate working space for six officers that can be utilised as a forward command post. The plan is one for Alice, one for Darwin and one for Katherine, plus one other yet to be determined.

Ms CARNEY: How much longer will the people of Katherine have to wait for their mobile police station?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not think it is the case of how much longer. It was an election commitment and it will be delivered in this term. My advice is that the vehicle for Katherine should be available in late August.

Ms CARNEY: This year?

Mr HENDERSON: This year.

Ms CARNEY: Right, thank you. And Darwin?

Mr HENDERSON: Darwin by late July.

Ms CARNEY: This year?

Mr HENDERSON: This year.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. They are not always trick questions, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: It is not hard. Absolutely, and I am very pleased with the initiative.

Ms CARNEY: It is your budget, your announcements. Ask an honest question, get an honest answer. Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: Absolutely!

Ms CARNEY: Do not be so nervous.

Mr HENDERSON: That would be the day!

Ms CARNEY: Can I ask you about the mounted police station – mounted police station! That will be novel and most innovative. Can I ask you instead about the mounted police patrols. They did exist in Alice Springs. I know that there was some public discussion about it. Is there any allocation in the existing budget to reactivate those patrols again in Alice Springs this term?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer to the commissioner in a minute. I can say that the initiative was a trial. That was an initiative of the commissioner, and the commissioner can speak of the outcomes of the trial. It was looking at ways of improving the delivery of police services, the capability of police to respond and attend hot spots. It was a trial that was proposed; it was never a service that was promised to the people of Alice Springs. I will defer to the commissioner to discuss the trial and the outcomes.

Ms CARNEY: If you do not mind, can I just steer you in the direction of my question. My question was is it going to be reactivated? I know about the trial, but are you going to do it in this term?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister can go on with his answer.

Mr HENDERSON: There is no additional funding provided in the budget for a trial this term. However, if the commissioner was to determine that, operationally, it was something that he wanted to do, that is the prerogative of the commissioner. I can hand over to the commissioner for additional advice.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. The trial of the mounted section in Alice Springs found that it was extremely well received by the community. In efficiency and effectiveness of policing, we believe there are better ways to achieve those outcomes. Certainly, they provide good value in reassurance policing but, in the overall policing effort, we believe there are more effective ways to do that. There is also a lot of support required to sustain the police on the beat, so to speak for a period of time. I would expect that mobile police stations would provide a better service to the community. However, having said that, we do deploy the mounted section on a required basis. It is not unusual for them to work at Adelaide River, Katherine or, indeed, Alice Springs. If the Commander in Alice Springs was desirous to have a mounted police return for a special operation, we would look at how we might support that.

Ms CARNEY: Do you have mounted police patrols operating regularly in Darwin?

Commissioner WHITE: We do.

Ms CARNEY: On the basis of what the commissioner has said, if they are a more efficient way of policing in Alice Springs? Why would you have mounted police patrols in Darwin? What is the difference?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I defer it to the commissioner for a policing answer but, essentially, policing is a mix of different methods, I suppose, of policing across the Territory. I think I am right in saying, commissioner, that our mounted police unit is the oldest in Australia?

Commissioner WHITE: One of the oldest, minister, yes.

Mr HENDERSON: One of the oldest in Australia. It has provided a great service, and it would be very sad - and I am sure the community would be very sad – to see the cessation of what has been a part of police history. The commissioner can talk on the operational side.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. There is certainly an historical element to the existence of the mounted section. The police force was known as the Northern Territory Mounted Police up until about 1914.

However, in regards to my previous comments, we would not look to expand the mounted police section in Darwin. However, I do not see a reason to do away with it, even though there are more effective ways of posting, such as the mobile police stations.

The other point I would make is that, within Darwin, there are a number of ceremonial and special events throughout the year that provide weight and support to the existence of the section in Darwin. I am not sure that I see any capacity to grow in Darwin.

Ms CARNEY: Do you see why the question would be asked that, if it is good enough for Darwin, why would you not have it in Alice Springs? There is an inconsistency, on the one hand, saying in Alice Springs there are more efficient ways of policing and, yet, in Darwin not maintaining that argument?

Mr HENDERSON: Certainly, you can run a hypothetical argument like that for any community across the Northern Territory. The commissioner has advised operationally there are more effective means of policing the community. I suppose what we have to be mindful of is effectiveness, results and outcomes. The commissioner advises me there are more effective means for providing safer communities in Alice Springs as opposed to establishing a mounted patrol. Alice Springs has not had a mounted patrol for many years now. A patrol was established and there was certainly no reason given by government to the people of Alice Springs to believe that there was any ongoing commitment other than a trial.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you for the answer, minister, I will not press the issue. Given that the outcome for this input is enhanced community safety, I would like to ask a question in relation to the last crime statistics. I know we quibble - to be polite, we actually argue about the significance or otherwise of the crime statistics. If you look at the last crime statistics - and I will not go through them all - at the very high percentages of offences, whether they be property offences, assaults, house breaks and so on, do you concede, at least for that particular quarter, that you failed to provide the enhanced community safety which is listed as an outcome for this output area?

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Chairman, I do not know where to begin. I will try to keep this part of the hearings as constructive as possible. I do not believe that the government or the police force has failed, given statistical impacts on a quarter-by-quarter basis. Any analysis of crime statistics and, certainly, any informed analysis of crimes statistics say, that to get a true picture in regard to the level of crime in the community, is to take a look at those statistics over time. In the trends, particularly in property crimes across the Northern Territory, we have seen significant reductions across the Northern Territory. There are always going to be occasions where there are increases above the norm of the background level of activity. We are never going to eliminate all crime. The commissioner can talk about groups of people that may be part of operations that operate for a time until they are caught, and they are dealt with, that lead to the spikes.

I urge the Leader of the Opposition, in this debate, to actually look at the trend figures as opposed to focusing on the quarter-by-quarter figures.

Ms CARNEY: It was just an example, that is all. It was just an example.

Mr HENDERSON: I am answering by way of, if you were to look at those figures over time across the majority of categories of crime across the Northern Territory, you will see trend decreases. That is not to say that quarter-by-quarter increases are not a concern. Police, through intelligence-led principles, actually look at those statistics and target operations to deal with them. They deal with them very effectively. In further comment on quarterly statistics, I might hand over to the commissioner.

Ms CARNEY: Can I interrupt you ...?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, no. Please finish your response.

Ms CARNEY: Well, he just – well, it is important point ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, no.

Ms CARNEY: Please, Mr Chairman, it is a legitimate one because what we are getting is two answers to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, no. Leader of the Opposition, you asked the question; the minister is responding. He has now handed it ...

Ms CARNEY: Well, in that case, we can double the time so that we can ask all of our questions. We are going to get two answers to every question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: ... handed over to the commissioner to respond. Please continue. Leader of the Opposition, will you please be quiet and let the commissioner participate in this.

Mr HENDERSON: I think that is very offensive. Again, have a go at me, but leave other people out of it. Okay?

Ms CARNEY: Well, minister, you are the minister. What you are doing is you are having two bites of the cherry ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, you are wasting your time.

Ms CARNEY: ... you are giving an answer and then you are throwing to the commissioner who is in the invidious position of needing to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

Ms CARNEY: ... repeat what you say.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, I will call you to order, please. I will call you to order. Please, continue with your answer, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: If the Leader of the Opposition does not want a further explanation of the crime figures, ask the next question. If you do not want the answers, you will not get them.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. That is my point, thank you. You answered my question, and I am very happy with your answer, thank you very much indeed.

Minister, my next question is in relation to the collection of crime statistics. You would be aware that the published crime statistics include, I think, six regions? They are all highlighted in the crime statistics - Darwin, Alice, Palmerston, Tennant Creek, Nhulunbuy and Katherine. Is it your understanding that those crime statistics include offences in remote communities in the Northern Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: I would have to defer that question to the Police Commissioner. The statistics are gathered from the PROMIS database. How the PROMIS database records statistics in remote communities I am not sure, so I will go to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: The quarterly crime statistics are produced by the Office of Crime Statistics, so I am not completely familiar with their methodology. I point to my annual report which produces statistics in relation to total reported crime for the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, minister, you do not know whether the crimes – no, sorry, I will withdraw that. All crimes that are committed in remote areas, or those that are reported, go into the police database, PROMIS. Therefore, would you expect they would normally find their way into the crime stats regularly? Or do you think the crime stats are just for those six regional areas?

Mr HENDERSON: This is an issue of interpretation but, again, the police record all reported crimes in the PROMIS database. If you want the detail of how the officers in Justice interrogate that database to produce their report, it is not some level of detail that I have.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Minister, I am wondering whether you have a thorough understanding of how much crime is committed in some communities. Let us talk about Wadeye, because that is the one so many people have been talking about. Surely, you would want to know how much crime was being committed in Wadeye in order for you to allocate resources such as police? If those details cannot be found in the crime statistics, where can they be found?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I just correct the Leader of the Opposition. As Police minister, I do not allocate police resources; that is the responsibility of the Police Commissioner. In regards to the crime statistics, they can be found in the police annual report.

Ms CARNEY: In relation to your comment that you do not allocate the police resources, was it not the case that you, or your Chief Minister, recently advised the media that you had allocated two additional police officers for Wadeye?

Mr HENDERSON: No. If you read the press releases it would be that the Police Commissioner advised that two extra resources would be allocated. We fund the establishment of the police force. Determining where those police are employed under the *Police Administration Act* is the responsibility of the Police Commissioner.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. You issued the media release?

Mr HENDERSON: I issued the media release; I am the Police minister.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, you are. Earlier, I referred to a reference to you as follows: 'Henderson is viewed by many within the party as ambitious and opportunistic with no real understanding of ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, stop there.

Ms CARNEY: My question is ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition!

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have trotted this out before; you have trotted it out three times. Could you kindly tell me ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order! I have not. I have produced it once earlier to the ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you tell me where this relates to the budget item?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman. The article says: 'Under Henderson's watch as Police minister, Wadeye has had to cope with increasing levels of violence'. My question to the minister is: how many times has he been to Wadeye as Police minister? Has he resolved, or determined in the course of his visits, that the Treasurer would need to allocate further resources to address what are increasing needs of the community at Wadeye?

Mr HENDERSON: It is interesting that the Leader of the Opposition's sole information in regard to preparing for this debate is an article that appeared in the *National Indigenous Times* yesterday. But ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order, Mr Chairman! That is complete nonsense; you know it and you should not be doing it but you are, after all ...

Mr HENDERSON: Well, you are the one who keeps referring ...

Ms CARNEY: ... ambitious and opportunistic. That is okay because I want her job too. It is okay; you are amongst friends.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, I will put you on a warning if you do not start getting a bit of dialogue going here. Do not talk over the minister. Let him finish his question, you respond and then we can have a formal friendly exchange.

Ms CARNEY: Can I ask that he does not put words in my mouth, Mr Chairman ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: He did not put words into your mouth. Please continue.

Ms CARNEY: ... as he has done consistently. In any event ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No. The minister has to respond.

Ms CARNEY: ... the answer is? Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: The answer to the question is, to my recollection, I have been to Wadeye twice as Police minister and minister for other things as well. In regard to whether I direct the Treasurer to increase and allocate additional resources, I have no capacity to direct the Treasurer. The government is formulating a whole-of-government response to the issues that are prevalent at Wadeye.

Anybody who has lived in the Northern Territory for any period of time would know that Wadeye is a community that, sadly, cyclically goes through scales of gang-related activity that we have seen recently. The issue is not a new one for Wadeye. It is certainly an issue that is of concern to government. Police are deploying additional resources as appropriate, and we are working towards a whole-of-government improved outcome for the Wadeye community, including trying to engage the Commonwealth government in a way that is going to see better outcomes for the people of Wadeye.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. I did not suggest that you would direct the Treasurer, you have your budget Cabinet process. Over five years as Police minister, you have been to Wadeye twice. I take it that it follows from that that you have not ever made any representation, in the form of encouragement or otherwise to the Treasurer, to increase police resources at Wadeye?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not going to speculate and detail discussions I may or may not have with the Treasurer.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so you did not go into bat for them?

Mr HENDERSON: How often have you been to Wadeye?

Ms CARNEY: You have been there twice ...

Mr HENDERSON: Well, how often have you been there?

Ms CARNEY: ... once, apparently, over five years. Hello!

Mr HENDERSON: How often have you been there?

Ms CARNEY: Five years! I know you hate it, but this is the bit where we actually ask the questions and you try to do your hardest not to answer them.

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is also the bit where we treat each other with respect, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Well, some do, some do not.

I move on from Wadeye, in light of your failure in the last five years to even be there regularly, let alone go into bat for increased police resources. I ask you about the Building Safer Communities Strategy and the Safer Communities Program. Can you take me through the Safer Communities Program - the key elements of it and what implications it has for police?

Mr HENDERSON: You are talking about the Department of Justice, Building Safer Communities?

Ms CARNEY: Well, I am not really sure where it falls because ...

Mr HENDERSON: Well, it belongs to Justice. It is a Justice document.

Ms CARNEY: Well, one wonders why it is in the Department of Chief Minister's annual report. It makes repeated reference to police and a whole-of-government approach, hence, my question to you as Police minister, that you might have known. In relation to Children and Young People, it says from the Chief Minister's annual report of the Safer Communities Program, that it contributed to the development of a Youth Justice Strategy in partnership with the Department of Justice, the Northern Territory Police and some other government agencies.

Can you tell us what was done under this heading of Children and Young People? Did it include education campaigns? What exactly did it include, because we cannot find that. We do not know the answer.

Mr HENDERSON: It would be very helpful if I had a copy of the document that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to ...

Ms CARNEY: Happy to provide it to you.

Mr HENDERSON: ... just in terms of trying to understand and conceptualise an answer to the question.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps three copies because I will table it. You, as minister, often talk about the whole-of-government approach. We have seen slabs of things appear in annual reports and so on. This one makes a number of references to police. I was wondering whether, as Chief Minister - there is that slip again. I was wondering whether you, as Police minister, knew about those programs and whether you can enlighten us as to their success or otherwise?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, when I see the document. I just say first up, as Police minister, that police in the domain of policy input and activity around youth-related crime would be through the juvenile diversionary program that is actually run through the Northern Territory Police. Obviously, individual police officers in communities have active roles in regard to juvenile diversionary programs on communities. School-based constables are also a large part of the work that police do in interfacing with young people.

Regarding this document from the Chief Minister contributing to the development of the Youth Justice Strategy in partnership with police, justice, employment, education and training, I suggest the major part of that would be through the juvenile diversionary program.

Ms CARNEY: The next bullet point there refers to anti-violence education programs. Police, presumably, would be involved in that? Can you tell us whether it happened in the last 12 months?

Mr HENDERSON: That does not state that police are involved in specific anti-violence education programs in schools. Certainly, through school-based constables all sorts of issues are discussed. Police have just secured funding independently for a families initiative in Katherine. Police have established the Violent Crime Reduction Strategy. Regarding education programs in schools, I am not aware of specific police involvement. That dot point does not say the police have a specific involvement.

Ms CARNEY: No, I was just asking whether or not they did. If you look down to – let us pick another heading, Partners in Crime Prevention, it refers to the Office of Women's Policy - to a couple of things - and some work that they would do under this Safer Communities Program. It refers to raising awareness of domestic and family violence issues. Given that one of the key functions of this output area is - and I will quote again – 'to address community safety issues', can you tell us what work has been undertaken by police in the last 12 months that has been specifically targeted at those areas - other than legislative changes, obviously?

Mr HENDERSON: There has been significant work conducted by police, particularly through the Violent Crime Reduction Strategy and Domestic and Personal Violence Units. I will refer to the commissioner to outline the work that has happened and the effectiveness of that work over the last 12 months.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. At a planning day in 2004, we felt as though we needed to strengthen our capacity in relation to our responses to personal and family violence and, in particular, domestic violence. As a consequence, we undertook some research. Our own research revealed that 20% of victims were repeat victims - that is, they had been the subject of a violent incidents more than once in a 12-month period – and 30% of offenders were repeat offenders, with 60% of all victims being women. We thought that we needed to strengthen our capacity.

We created Family, Personal and Domestic Violence Protections Units and doubled the capacity of those units, and also hired a couple of lawyers. We set about implementing nine strategies, including putting in place two new positions of a project manager and quality assurance person to oversight the development of the strategy. As a consequence of that, we have found that our response is much better than it ever was. We are proactively policing domestic violence orders in the same way we take repeat offenders for property crime. We will continue to commit ourselves to this strategy to make the Territory a safer place for all Territorians.

One other aspect of the strategy was that we applied to the federal government for some funding, jointly with Family and Community Services, to establishment a Peace At Home Project in Katherine. We were successful in obtaining just under \$1m over four years. That project has just commenced, the aim of which is to improve the coordinated response to victims of family and domestic violence in the Katherine and Borroloola region.

I am encouraged by the work of the police force across the Territory but, in particular, the Personal Domestic Violence Protections Unit staff. I spoke recently with the staff at Alice Springs and listened to some of the challenges they face every day and the demands of their job. They are resolute, and told me that they feel as though victims are becoming increasingly confident in reporting to police, and that the

action taken by police will certainly help them out of their predicament. We have a very strong commitment to actively and robustly policing domestic violence.

Ms CARNEY: Regarding the research about which you spoke, did you research anything in remote communities or was it just urban centres?

Commissioner WHITE: The figures were Territory-wide, so the figure applies across the Territory. We did not break it down into regions. 20% of all victims were repeat victims and 30% of offenders were repeat offenders.

Ms CARNEY: I understand when we smiled at each other because you know, through you, minister, where I am coming from. The figures may well be Territory-wide and extrapolated, of course, they would be. My question is: was any of the research undertaken at remote communities?

Commissioner WHITE: No, because it is based on crimes reported to the police. Those statistics are based on incidences reported to the police. It was based on PROMIS data, which is Territory-wide, so the research we undertook was in relation to offences reported to the police.

Ms CARNEY: Are you saying that there was no difference between the research in urban areas and remote areas?

Commissioner WHITE: We did not break it down into urban and remote.

Ms CARNEY: You just got it off the computer system, is that where you got it?

Commissioner WHITE: Yes, we looked at our statistics in relation to reported assaults and, from that, we looked at patterns of repeat victimisation and repeat offending.

Ms CARNEY: Right, and that was on the database.

Commissioner WHITE: We recognise, of course, that those statistics might fluctuate across the Territory, depending on the location.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. You have used the word 'research'. Did you involve the Office of Women's Policy or, indeed, the Policy Advice and Public Sector Coordination Division of the Department of the Chief Minister in this research, or were the results given to them?

Commissioner WHITE: We undertook the research through our statistician and the Criminal Intelligence Section. My understanding is that they did speak to officers from those departments, at least from the Office of Women's Policy and the Department of the Chief Minister. However, I cannot elaborate any further on those details.

Ms CARNEY: How many remote communities are there in the Northern Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: It all depends on your definition of a community. There is any number of remote outstations that may have between two or three homes and up to several dozen, so what is your definition of community?

Ms CARNEY: Well, I was looking at yours, really, because you, as Police minister need to - well, you would say the Police Commissioner allocates resources but, you, as Police minister, would have some input into the securing of the resources in the first place. For instance, there was the announcement of two additional police officers for Wadeye. Where I am trying to get to is: how many communities in the Territory do you think should have additional police resources? Is there a population cut-off size? Is there an area restriction?

Mr HENDERSON: There is some history to go through here. As Police minister – if you ask any Police Commissioner, or Police minister in Australia, and you would get the answer: 'Yes, we could always do more with resources and deploy more resources'.

Regarding the history of the Northern Territory and how decisions were made in regard to where police facilities have been established over time, and the criteria for why those police facilities were established in those locations, I suppose there would have been any number of criteria over time. What I can talk about is since we came to government in 2001, when we did inherit a police force that had been very significantly

run down, had very significant troubles in not only policing the main urban centres of the Northern Territory, but of providing relief officers to police stationed in remote stations across the Territory. The capacity was virtually zero.

We went on to a program of establishing and commissioning an independent review, where O'Sullivan came in to determine what he believed, with all his years of experience as commissioner in Queensland, would be an adequate level of police resourcing across the Northern Territory, and government took on that report.

We also have determined, through advice from the Police Commissioner and through the Cabinet process, to start expanding the number of police facilities in remote areas. The police station at Kintore was built in 2002-03. We have the new facility at Numbulwar that we opened earlier this year, the new facility at Mutitjulu which will be opened next year, the new police station at Humpty Doo that was provided, a commitment with Western Australia that we would place a Northern Territory police officer at Warrakuna as soon as that station is established around August this year, and a major upgrade of the Ali Curung Police Station. We are on a program of expanding our police presence across the Northern Territory. I certainly take advice from the Police Commissioner on that.

We have increased the department's budget by 55% since we came to government, and we can only pump new recruits through the Berrimah Recruit Centre as fast as we can. I would love to see additional police facilities across the Northern Territory, but the reality is you can only progress at the rates that you can progress at. The record has been pretty good. I say, as any Police minister would, that sure, we could deploy more resources. Any Police minister in Australia would in the same way that any Health minister would say he could do with more doctors and nurses, and any Education minister would say we could do with more teachers.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. How many police stations? You listed some; they may be all of them, I do not know. You may have this in a table. How many police stations exist at remote communities in the Northern Territory?

Mr HENDERSON: There are 40 police stations across the Territory. They are detailed in the annual report. We can provide a breakdown of where those stations are. We have the four main ones in the major centres of Alice Springs, Darwin, Katherine and Nhulunbuy. So, 36.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Well, perhaps because you said you can provide the breakdown of where they are, that would lead neatly to my next question about how many police officers are at those police stations? Do you have that information or would you prefer me to ask that one on notice?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that information available in the annual report, minister?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, we do have staffing station by station; we just have to find it. We have previously tabled this. We can table it. This is always an exercise at a point in time. You have people coming and going, and it is a moving feast, but it is a statement in time.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that would be 31 May?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not sure when.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, okay.

Mr HENDERSON: 31 May.

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr HENDERSON: So yes, we can.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you going to table that document, minister?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Are we done with that one? Minister, what have you done in relation to the Northern Territory Police Association's concerns expressed about the staffing levels at Numbulwar, and their

comments that, in the government's haste to open the police station, there were concerns that it has only community police officers? Has that situation been rectified?

Mr HENDERSON: If you would like the commissioner to elaborate on my answer, I am not sure he will. My answer, as minister, is that the commitment to Numbulwar was to build a police post, to staff that police post with two Aboriginal Community Police Officers to be supported by police on Groote Eylandt.

In regard to the comments made by the Police Association, I point out that the O'Sullivan review, which had the endorsement of the Police Association, recommended that we move away from police posts across the Northern Territory where we had one ACPO operating in a community by themselves; recognising that the duty of care towards that officer and the expectations placed on that officer was not best practice in this day and age. O'Sullivan recommended that we move from single ACPO stations to dual ACPO stations across the Northern Territory. Therefore, O'Sullivan funded an additional 28 ACPO positions to do that. That recommendation received the support of the Police Association at the time.

However, the ACPO scheme is an evolving scheme and one the commissioner and myself, as minister, continue to look at to see how we can get better outcomes. If you would like the commissioner to elaborate more on the Numbulwar issue, I can say the commitment was always to have two ACPO stationed there in light of O'Sullivan's comments that we should not have one ACPO community police post but there should always be two there. That is what we did and what the association supported at the time.

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you, I do not need further elaboration from the commissioner. I take it the answer to my question is that the situation remains unchanged; that there is either one or two ACPOs at that station? Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: There are two ACPOs at Numbulwar supported by police from Groote Eylandt.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Of the 36 police stations at the remote communities we spoke about only a couple of questions ago, how many of them are staffed by only ACPOs?

Mr HENDERSON: It would be very few. Just bear with us for two seconds. I will get the commissioner to respond, Leader of the Opposition.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. A number of Aboriginal Community Police Officers work alongside sworn police officers across the Territory; however, there are some areas where Aboriginal Community Police Officers work alone. Perhaps the best example of that is Santa Teresa with ACPO, Philip Alice. Members will probably be aware that an ACPO works, or was until recently working from Galiwinku and from Milikapiti. There is, in fact, a small number of localities where ACPOs do work alone but under the supervision of visiting police. Certainly, Numbulwar is not the first; there are existing locations.

What we have been keen to do in the last 12 months is attempt to recruit ACPOs to those remote localities. It has not been without its difficulties, I have to say. Finke is another one where we have had a couple of ACPOs, but it does fluctuate. We are currently recruiting and are going to commence an ACPO course in Alice Springs this month on 26 June for either 13 or 15 ACPOs and, hopefully, they will fill some of the vacant positions of ACPOs.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I put the question again. I am happy to do it on notice. Of the 36 police stations located at remote communities in the Northern Territory, how many are staffed by ACPOs, whether one or two?

Mr HENDERSON: We will double check, but currently four.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: We will double check, and if we are wrong, you will know the answer.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. In the interest of time I will leave it there, Mr Chairman, on that output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I am pleased the mobile police station is currently in Alice Springs. If the motor bike patrols continue, because there were some accidents that I

know occurred with those, and also the sniffer dogs; are they based in Alice where are they working out of and how far?

Mr HENDERSON: Good afternoon, member for Braiting.

Mrs BRAHAM: Good afternoon, minister.

Mr HENDERSON: The issues about the motor bikes and sniffer dogs are operational so I will defer those questions to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. The use of motorcycles is at the discretion of the Commander for Southern Regions. I understand they are a useful supplement to policing and ought to continue, so I assume that is the case.

In relation to drug dogs, the two drug dogs we currently have have a Territory-wide region and do work Alice Springs on occasions in support of the local police. Recently, the Australian government announced funding for a drug dog for Alice Springs, and I have committed to a second drug dog from my resources for Alice Springs. The recruitment process is now under way to fill two positions for two drug dogs in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: If you need someone to mind them on weekends, I will volunteer.

Commissioner WHITE: I might take you up on that.

Mrs BRAHAM: We have been discussing ACPOs. Do all the station ACPO people have vehicles now? I notice there is an allocation, but have we completed and given them vehicles or are some still to go?

Mr HENDERSON: Half last year, half this year. We have the information here of what numbers. I just have to find it. Bear with us, it is here somewhere. While we are looking that up, have you another question?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes. Do ACPOs have power of arrest?

Mr HENDERSON: Again, I will defer to the commissioner for specifics.

Commissioner WHITE: They have instruments of appointment which gives them the legal right to exercise powers of authority, including the power to arrest. There is a certificate scheme in place for ACPOs – Certificate II, III and IV – and, depending on what level that is to the extent to which they can exercise those authorities. Perhaps the best way to describe it that if there was, say, a disturbance at Santa Teresa, we would expect that the ACPOs to then and there deal with it, but then contact Alice Springs officers who would travel to Santa Teresa to assist in compiling the brief of evidence against the alleged offender.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am quite sure Philip Alice would be capable of controlling any situation down there. How many ACPOs have actually gone on with their training, and have any become fully-trained police officers?

Mr HENDERSON: Before I hand that to the commissioner, this is something that I am very keen to see, through the commissioner: much better defined and structured pathways for Aboriginal Community Police Officers to move through to fully-sworn police officers. Historically, those pathways have not been clearly defined and support structures put in place. That is something that I am keen to see, as minister. In regard to specific numbers who may have made that move, I do not think it is very many, and it could and should be more. However, I temper that as well, that a lot of ACPOs that I have spoken to are quite happy with where they are at. Not everybody wants to move forward. Commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. We have employed an indigenous project officer with the specific intention of increasing the number of ACPOs or Aboriginal people into mainstream policing. We see this very much as the future of policing in the Northern Territory. We recently reviewed the ACPO scheme and we are still conducting work in relation to how we work with Cabinet in relation to that matter. However, we are very anxious to build the capacity of the police force with a fully-sworn policing presence through indigenous people.

We do have a range of programs including literacy and numeracy courses at Batchelor College for ACPOs. We are looking at a graduate program, a Certificate II, III and IV, and then into mainstream policing. Of course, the ACPOs can elect to either stay an ACPO or go to mainstream policing. However, we are very keen to recruit indigenous people direct into mainstream policing.

Mrs BRAHAM: I would like to see more.

Mr HENDERSON: This is some supplementary evidence in regards to vehicles – we have found the place. In 2005-06, six vehicles were purchased and issued to the following locations: Milikapiti, Galiwinku, Santa Teresa, Maranboy, Numbulwar and Alyangula. Depending on the outcome of the remote ACPO intake that we are doing at the moment, there are another six vehicles which are funded in this budget. Any vehicles not required for the new locations - it is a bit of a moving feast - are expected to be allocated according to the following priorities: Timber Creek, Daly River, Finke, Mutitjulu for the new police post, Ngukurr and a final vehicle yet to be allocated. Six have been allocated, there are six in the budget this year. It really depends where we end up deploying the ACPOs.

Mrs BRAHAM: We are getting to the stage where we are nearly covering all communities.

Mr HENDERSON: It was funded over two years, so my understanding is we would have covered all communities where we have ACPOs at the end of this financial year's allocation.

Mrs BRAHAM: For social order patrols in Darwin, you have allocated \$0.63m. What does this entail? Who is involved in the social order patrols? What is the equivalent in Alice Springs?

Mr HENDERSON: The history of the Social Order Units is that, as you may remember, it was as a result of an election commitment to deploy eight additional Aboriginal Community Police Officers in two social order patrols to take over from the community-based patrols that Mission Australia were providing. It was understood and determined that the people who were working in those Mission Australia patrols really had no powers other than to encourage people to desist from whatever antisocial behaviour they may have been engaged in. The funding was transferred to the police. Presently, there are seven Aboriginal Community Police Officers in the Darwin Social Order Unit, and they patrol hot spots as required.

What we are doing is looking at the effectiveness of those patrols over time. I can say, as Police minister, that the debate is open at the moment about where we go in Alice Springs. We really need to monitor the effectiveness of this type of policing across Darwin over a period of time. The feedback that I get is that they are being very effective. That is, essentially, the answer.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, the wardens and the Day and Night Patrol in Alice, to be honest, are toothless tigers because they do not have authority at all. It would be good if they were trained to take on a wider role and have a bit more authority to go with that role. I see that is the fault with the system at the moment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that a question?

Mrs BRAHAM: No, no, that was a statement.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I thought it was.

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry about that, Mr Chairman.

Mr HENDERSON: On advice from the commissioner, we have nine ACPOs currently stationed in Alice Springs. Yes, that is the establishment, and those currently operative is seven. A lot of the work of those ACPOs in Alice would be on social order-type patrols and activities.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me how often the police get called to accompany ambulance call-outs to town camps? That is a fairly broad question, but it seems as though it is becoming almost a necessity.

Mr HENDERSON: I have to defer that to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: I do not have specific details other than to say it is not uncommon if an ambulance is responding to an incident somewhere in Alice Springs. It might well be as a result of a crime being committed. The police would ordinarily attend in any event. For instance, if it was a 000 call through their communications centre, both would be deployed or despatched to the incident. That would be the basis for the police attendance.

Mr HENDERSON: Mr Chairman, I have clarification on advice previously provided. All 36 police stations have fully-sworn police officers stationed at them, and some have ACPOs. At this time, there is only Numbulwar and Santa Teresa where ACPOs are not supported by police officers, but these are police posts not stations. In terms of where we only have ACPOs, currently it is Numbulwar and Santa Teresa.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just a couple more. The Blue Light Discos. Many of the officers have, in the past, worked on a voluntary capacity. Has any funding been put into the budget this year to support the Blue Light Discos?

Mr HENDERSON: I have to defer that to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: The Crime Prevention Section incorporates a number of community-based activities including Blue Light Discos, an idea that led to the Junior Police Rangers, PCYC and Neighbourhood Watch. Blue Light Discos have a very active program, both locally and across the Territory. In addition to that, some police officers have taken upon their initiative to conduct their own blue lights discos. A great case in point was Senior Constable Olivia Andrew at Kintore, now at Ali Curung, who promotes Blue Light Discos. I do not have the number, but it is quite an extensive program throughout the course of the year across the Territory. We fully support the Blue Light Discos. We see it is a very productive way to engage young people in healthy, social activities and ...

Mrs BRAHAM: And I encourage you to keep doing it.

Commissioner WHITE: ... the police are very proud to be able to take part in it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one last one, minister. You may recall a couple of years ago, I talked to you about the Alice Springs pistol range and the work that had to be done to bring it up to police standard. That work is still not completed. I believe that it is still not complying with police regulations after two years, which is frustrating people, because there has been work done. I ask whether the police are overseeing the contract as it was put it. Even though they may not see it, it seems ridiculous that all this work has been done and it is still not complying. Masters Games is coming up in October. I am wondering whether you would take it upon yourself to check what is happening and why it is not compliant?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not know if the commissioner has specific advice but, if he does not, I will take it on board and find out.

Commissioner WHITE: The member did raise this with me in a visit to her office recently in Alice Springs. I did take it up with Commander Coffey in Alice Springs. He understood work was progressing on that. However, we will check and provide a response to the minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: I believe you need to give a bit of hurry up.

Mr HENDERSON: Give it a hurry up. Surely, the police just define the standards, and then the club has to comply?

Mrs MILLER: That is right. That is exactly right.

Mrs BRAHAM: Who knows.

Mr HENDERSON: It is not for the police to issue the contract and manage the contract. It would be to say: 'This is what you need to do to comply' and ...

Mrs BRAHAM: But it is no good coming in afterwards and saying: 'That is no good'.

Mr HENDERSON: I will take it on board and find out.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you. That is all for that, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regard to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – GENERAL POLICING, CRIME DETECTION INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION

Output 2.1 – Response and Recovery Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, General Policing, Crime Protection, Investigational Prosecutions, Output 2.1, Response and Recovery Services.

Ms CARNEY: In the interests of time, no, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The member for Braintree might have one up her sleeve.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I do not.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You don't? Oh well, that being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Mrs BRAHAM: True, I had one too, but I have covered it in other ways.

Mr HENDERSON: Can I just make a point, Mr Chairman? Regarding the comments about 'in the interests of time' it is available to all the committee members that there is 47 hours worth of time to debate the budget. However, if members feel that they do not have time to ask specific questions, there is always the opportunity to put those questions on notice, or to seek briefings. If that is done, I will take it on myself to respond as quickly as possible.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister.

Output 2.2 - Investigations

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Investigations. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, in the interests of time.

Mr HENDERSON: But again, if you have questions, put them on notice and we will get them back to you, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Are you going to keep going with this?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Ms CARNEY: Matty Bonson given you any paperwork today?

Output 2.3 – Services to the Judicial Process

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.3, Services to the Judicial Process. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, in the interests of time, Mr Chairman.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – ROAD SAFETY SERVICES

Output 3.1 - Road Safety Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I call on questions related to Output Group 3.0, Road Safety Services, Output 3.1, Road Safety Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Eureka!

Ms CARNEY: Minister, are you confident that the calibration and testing equipment and regimes of speed cameras are satisfactory - up to speed - no pun intended? Well, in fact, there was, but I did not hear anyone laughing.

Mr HENDERSON: There was. Certainly, before I defer to the commissioner for a detail on the current debate, as Police minister, yes, I am confident in the new equipment that has been purchased over the last few years. The commissioner might be able to get some advice on the current debate.

Ms CARNEY: With respect, you have answered my question.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I am confident.

Ms CARNEY: My next question is: is it the case that you planned to test 660 000 vehicles with speed cameras last year, and that your final estimate is something in the order of 850 000 vehicles?

Mr HENDERSON: I might defer to the commissioner, but they are individual. I understand it is speed camera checks, when you drive past a speed camera. Those are the sorts of numbers we are looking at. Yes, vehicles passing a speed camera checkpoint as opposed to police pulling over for speeding.

Ms CARNEY: You would be aware, minister, that one of your colleagues, the minister for Transport, has said publicly that there has been no improvement in Territorians' driving habits. My question is: if the extra checks do not appear to be fixing the problem, then why are they being done? Why are you doing them?

Mr HENDERSON: I am sorry, can I get that question again.

Ms CARNEY: If Territorians' driving habits have not improved and, if the extra checks do not appear to be fixing the problem, why are you doing them?

Mr HENDERSON: The community, very rightly, is going to have a significant debate on traffic issues and the road tolls. My advice is there has been a decline in offences detected. That can be largely attributed to an increased policing presence on the roads and greater compliance. For camera infringements, it was approximately 850 000-odd. In 2003-04, 20 932 infringements were issued. In 2004-05, 18 045 infringements were issued. In 2005-06, 25 019.

The advice that I have is that, since the speed cameras were introduced in 1997, I think it was, there has been a reduction. However, it has to be taken into account that speed cameras are not the only enforcement method that police deploy. In the O'Sullivan funding for this year, we will see the establishment, or the re-establishment, of dedicated road traffic units for Darwin and Alice Springs that will comprise 12 officers who will be specifically dedicated to road traffic enforcement on our roads in Darwin and Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: Do you know, minister, in the last 10-year period, how many fatal motor vehicle accidents have occurred in daylight hours on week days in our major centres?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have that level of breakdown. What I do have is fatalities from the period of 1999 to 2005 if the member would like those.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, please, that would be good, thank you.

Mr HENDERSON: There were 304 ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I thought you were going to table them. Are you happy to do that?

Mr HENDERSON: No, I will give you the numbers here. The fatalities were: in 1999 – 49; in 2000 - 51; 2001 - 50; 2002 – 55; 2003 – 53; 2004 – 35; and 2005 – 55; and January to June this year - 15. That is a terrible toll in anybody's recognition. It is certainly one that we are about to engage in significant community debate on how we reduce that toll.

Ms CARNEY: Do you run radars, say, at 3 am on Bagot Road on week nights?

Mr HENDERSON: I have to defer to the commissioner about how those decisions are made.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you minister. Quite possibly. The patrols are employed on a per-shift basis; given the instructions as to how they conduct their patrol activity for the duration of the shift. It may well be that part of that includes a direction by their supervisor to conduct a certain period of time on road safety.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, through you to the commissioner, will you accept it is generally the case that fatalities do not happen during the day, they happen at night in the Territory and, indeed, elsewhere?

Mr HENDERSON: I do not have that specific information but, again, I defer to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: Minister, I have to take the question on notice. I do not feel as though I have enough information to provide an accurate response to that question.

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

Ms CARNEY: I do not need to put it on notice thanks, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you say, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. You would be aware, minister, of the growing perception that speed cameras are a revenue raiser; that are positioned at peak times in peak places for revenue raising. Does it trouble you that the minister for Transport has commented that 190 000 Territory drivers have been speed checked with no effective result? Are you worried about the perception of the revenue raiser and, in any event, the speed checks not actually assisting, as commented on by the minister of Transport, to reduce the road toll?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not going to speculate on what other ministers may or may not have said. However, in the overall approach the police take to enforcing the laws of the roads, speed cameras are but a part of that. I reject any notion that the deployment of speed cameras is a revenue-raising exercise. It is a well acknowledged deterrent, not only across Australia but across the world in seeking a better compliance with speed limits. The perception may be there, but I do not agree.

In fact, one of the issues is looking at the level of penalty. At the moment, our infringement notices are way below the levels in other states and we are about to have a significant debate on what can be done to improve behaviour on the roads and reduce the road toll. Speed cameras are but a part of a suite of tools police use to ensure compliance with the road rules. That will be enhanced this year by the reestablishment of dedicated traffic units in Darwin and Alice.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. In the last financial year which, is for these purposes is 31 May, how much money has been raised from speed cameras?

Mr HENDERSON: I have a monthly breakdown here, but in totals – have you a total?

Commissioner WHITE: This financial year to date, the amount of infringement notices issued was \$2.083m, and the amount paid to 13 June was \$1.554m.

Ms CARNEY: So, you have raised, for want of a better expression, \$2.83m. The budget for road safety services is this year is \$10m. Do you think, minister, that with the revenue you have raised - which is significant for a small place like the Territory and a lot of Territorians are being affected, which is fine but it is a lot of money - in those circumstances the budget for road safety services should be increased?

Mr HENDERSON: I urge the Leader of the Opposition not to attempt to run the line that this is a revenue-raising exercise. It is not. Fines are imposed as a deterrent mechanism. Those fines are not hypothecated to the police budget. My understanding is that it is part of overall revenue that flows to Treasury. To try and draw some line that we should be hypothecating revenue raised in fines directly to the Road Traffic Branch is counter to what those fines are meant to achieve, which is compliance with the speed limit.

Ms CARNEY: Sure.

Mr HENDERSON: It is not a case of sending police out there to raise revenue to pay for their Road Traffic Branch.

Ms CARNEY: A previous question was: were you aware of the perception. I think you said basically that you are but you reject it and ...

Mr HENDERSON: I hope that it is not going to be filled.

Ms CARNEY: ... and I know you are twitchy what with the events over the last couple of days but it was just ...

Mr HENDERSON: I am very comfortable.

Ms CARNEY: ...but it was just a straightforward question requiring a straightforward and non-defensive answer. Thank you, minister. In the interests of time, that concludes my questions for this output area.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are not concerned about time, member for Braitling?

Mr HENDERSON: Just to correct the record, I am advised that the amount raised in infringements is \$2.08m this financial year not \$2.8m.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, many of our drivers on remote communities do not have licences. I am not sure whether this is in your area, but regarding driver education, what opportunities are there for people on communities to actually have driver education and get their licence?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to the commissioner for a bit more detail. It is an issue we are actually looking at, at the moment, with police in remote communities. They do a lot of work on behalf of the Motor Vehicle Registry. It is an issue we are currently looking at, at the moment: specifically how driver education takes place. Police in each police station in a remote community has a responsibility to get better compliance with licensing, registration, and road safety. I will hand over to the commissioner for a bit more discussion about how that is done, but it is a requirement of our remote stations.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. I do know that there are education programs specifically designed for indigenous communities, but I do not have the full details of those programs with me at the moment.

Mrs BRAHAM: It would be interesting to know which communities they are actually running in. Perhaps I can get that from you later?

Mr HENDERSON: We can provide you with the information either on notice or direct to your office, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Overseas drivers seem to be some of the people who have become fatalities on our roads. Is there any requirement for overseas drivers when they hire a vehicle from the road safety point of view?

Mr HENDERSON: Unless the commissioner has other information that would really be an issue for the licensing minister? However, in the debate that we are about to have as a community, I would like to see more effort go into making people from overseas aware of the conditions on our roads that they are going to be driving on. We are about to have that debate. I agree with you, member for Braitling. I believe more could and should be done in making people aware of what the conditions they are going to be driving in, in the Northern Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, do you support a demerit system?

Mr HENDERSON: The community is going to have that debate and, when government makes its position known, I will be supporting that position.

Ms CARNEY: Polls. They see what the community wants, and make their decision accordingly.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are you also considering road speeds on some of our remote roads?

Mr HENDERSON: The minister for Transport has said all options are on the table. I agree. The approach that I am going to be taking to this debate in my position as Police minister, on advice from police, is whatever additional sanctions that we may be looking to deploy, they have to be evidence-based. There

are a lot of places around the world that have tried various methods to reduce the road toll. Any additional sanctions that we do end up putting in place, as a result of the debates that the community is going to have, have to be evidence-based and lead to improved outcomes, otherwise they are not worth doing. Let us have the debate, bring on the evidence, and we will make the decisions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have a question, minister. I am not sure if you have these figures or not. You spoke about the number of road deaths that we have had. Have you any idea of the number of people injured on our roads and, with that as well, what the cost may be of hospital admissions or lost productivity - anything of this nature?

Mr HENDERSON: We do have that information in this briefing document. It is just a case of finding it, so just bear with us. Okay.

In numbers as opposed to the financial impacts, NT injury crashes have been decreasing during the last five years. The total injury crashes in 2004-05 were 684 compared with 861 in 2000-01. Total injury crashes in 2000-01 were 861, broken into serious and minor injuries; 2001-02 - 780; 2002-03 - 743; 2003-04 - 754; 2004-05 - 684; and July 2005 to March 2006 - 495. The advice is that the cost of fatalities to the community - how can you put a real number on it? - was \$1.3m per fatality, but we do not have one in regard to crashes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: As far as hospital admissions and that cost to the community, as well as ...

Mr HENDERSON: For a fatality is \$1.3m.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Lost productivity as well to businesses, not to mention the human cost?

Mr HENDERSON: Which you cannot put a value on, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It seems timely that we have this debate that you keep on alluding to, minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, does the Fines Recovery Unit come under you?

Mr HENDERSON: The minister for Justice.

Mrs BRAHAM: Oh, okay. There are lot of unrecovered fines, as far as I can see, but I will ask the minister for Justice.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, I am not ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions under Road Safety Services output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – FIRE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE MANAGEMENT

Output 4.1 – Fire Prevention and Response Management

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Fire Prevention and Response Management, Output 4.1, Fire Prevention and Response Management. Are there any questions?

Mr HENDERSON: I would just like to introduce Mr Bruce Mouatt, who is the Director of the Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: No, in the interests of time, I do not have any questions for this output area of Fire Prevention and Response Management. I have in the next output.

Mrs BRAHAM: I have one and I have lost it. It has something to do with the Marrara fire station, minister. It is on the plan at the moment?

Mr HENDERSON: No, Casuarina.

Mrs BRAHAM: Casuarina. It has Marrara here. I have the wrong one, have I?

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, it is the new one.

Mr HENDERSON: Oh, yes, sorry, the new one, yes. We are building the new fire station at Marrara to replace Casuarina.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I ask you the cost for that?

Mr HENDERSON: \$4.9m.

Mrs BRAHAM: There was an election promise for a new police station in the northern suburbs. Where is that at?

Mr HENDERSON: It is for this term of government. We are looking at how we do that. Certainly, the first cab off the rank is to relocate Casuarina Fire Station to Marrara. Then we are looking at options of how we rebuild the Casuarina Police Station. Do we demolish the existing police station on-site and, in the interim, relocate police officers to the old Casuarina Fire Station whilst we rebuild a new police station, or can we do something on-site? It is a project that will be commenced this term. It was an election commitment. The police station and the fire station are over 30 years old and it is good that they are being replaced.

Mrs Braham: That is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on Fire Prevention and Response Management? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – EMERGENCY SERVICES **Output 5.1 – Emergency Services**

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 5.0, Emergency Services, Output 5.1, Emergency services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you confirm that a review of Emergency Services is under way and was meant to be finalised in April but was not and, if that is the case, why was it not finalised?

Mr HENDERSON: I can confirm that an internal organisational review is taking place at Emergency Services. Regarding the timing for that, I will refer to Mr Mouatt.

Mr MOUATT: It is being concluded as we speak, and the plan is to conclude it about mid-year.

Ms CARNEY: What was concluded?

Mr MOUATT: The review. We are concluding the review at the present time.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, and when will it be concluded?

Mr MOUATT: The target is the middle of the year, June 30.

Ms CARNEY: This year, okay, sorry. Minister, you had the O'Sullivan review for the police and the Metis review for the firies. Have you considered getting an independent review of this part of the tri-service and, if not, why?

Mr HENDERSON: No, we have not considered that. There is an internal organisational review happening at the moment. The background to the O'Sullivan review to the Northern Territory Police Force was in light of a rapidly escalating crime rate, in regard to increasing concerns and representations from the association, but also concerns raised by the commissioner to the minister about morale issues within the police force and lack of resourcing. The O'Sullivan review was driven by very clear observations that the police were under-resourced and there were morale issues.

Regarding the Fire Service, we were experiencing, and there had been experienced for many years, significant industrial relations and management issues within the Fire Service. In spite of all efforts, those IR issues had not been resolved, therefore, an independent review of that organisation was developed. I do

not have similar concerns in regards to Emergency Services. However, any organisation should go through an organisational review from time to time, and that is what is currently happening in Emergency Services.

Ms CARNEY: So, you as minister believe that morale is high and that it is a well-funded organisation, I take it, from your answer?

Mr HENDERSON: There are always individuals within organisations who have concerns, but I do not have, regarding the provision of services to the community, the same concerns in regard to Emergency Services that I, as minister, had in regard to police and the Fire Service. However, that is not to say that there are not issues within that section of the department, and those issues are being considered in the current review.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, are you aware that there is a level of concern within Emergency Services that the outcome of the review will recommend that Emergency Services become part of the Fire Service so that our traditional tri-service is no longer a tri-service - it is just two. Two parts to the question. Firstly, are you aware of that concern? Secondly, are you, as minister, at this stage prepared to guarantee that that will not happen?

Mr HENDERSON: I am not going to pre-empt any recommendations that may come to me through an internal organisational review. I am certainly not going to pre-empt any consideration of what that review may recommend.

Ms CARNEY: Are you able to indicate whether you have, as minister, putting the review to one side, have a preference as to whether Emergency Services is absorbed into the Fire Service, or whether it should stay as a tri-service entity?

Mr HENDERSON: It is not for me to indicate any preference. I will take advice quite appropriately, through the director and the commissioner, once the review is concluded. Otherwise, what is the point of having organisational reviews if you are going to pre-empt the outcomes?

Ms CARNEY: Some people might regard it as corporate leadership, but perhaps you still have the trainer wheels on in that regard. Minister, are you aware that during the Katherine floods, Emergency Services personnel were working 18-hour shifts? Do you regard that as satisfactory?

Mr HENDERSON: I am aware that there was an extraordinary effort put in by a large number of people in the response to the Katherine floods. I am certainly aware that members of the Emergency Services branch put in extraordinary hours. I have thanked those people personally. They are very professional people who always deliver to the highest level of service to the community. Certainly, it was an extraordinary time and people across all parts of the community put in an extraordinary effort.

Ms CARNEY: As minister, are you aware of concerns expressed by volunteers - and there are something in the order of about 500 to 540 of them - that Emergency Services require more resources and would be ill-equipped for another disaster – think Cyclone Monica or Katherine floods?

Mr HENDERSON: The organisational review will identify those issues. As with any organisation, people within it, from outside of it – observers - will say that this organisation could do with more resources. That has to be run through an objective analysis. Virtually all organisations would run arguments that they require resources. There needs to be objective analysis put over those requests regarding what those organisations are expected to deliver.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, in Budget Paper No 3, page 143, there appears to be an increase in the budget - minor but an increase. In fact, it is \$30 000 or thereabouts. Can you confirm that the Assistant Director of Emergency Services is currently an EO1 but, recently, his job has been elevated to an ECO1 - in other words, a job from \$90 000 to a job at about the rate of \$147 000? Are you further aware that the increase outlined in the budget, in fact, results in a nett loss once the Assistant Director's job goes up to the level of \$147 000?

Mr HENDERSON: I am aware that the position has been upgraded and that shows the importance that the organisation has placed in getting the best person for the job in the position. In regard to budget allocations, I have to take that on notice. It is not for me to determine what level positions come out at. However, in order to get the best person for what is a very important role within the tri-service, that has been the level we need to advertise at.

Ms CARNEY: Of course, that has been done before the outcome of this very important internal review, which will include things such as the allocation of resources and so on. How can you say: 'Let us wait for the review in relation to some issues but not wait for the review in relation to the position of the Assistant Director'?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer the answer to the very specific operational staffing issue to the Police Commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you minister. In short, as an organisation we have a commitment to continuous improvement and have, in fact been running a contingency program since 2002. We saw the pending retirement of the long-serving Assistant Director Mr Mike Bowman as an opportunity to commence a process of building capacity within the emergency services, and felt it was appropriate to increase the contract arrangements to an EC01. Therefore, the new incumbent, once that person takes up employment, is required to implement the recommendations from the review and continue to build the capacity of the Northern Territory Emergency Services.

Ms CARNEY: Is it the case, minister, that the very small budgetary increase that the service receives will be absorbed by a higher position at a rate of about \$147 000 going to the Assistant Director? Might it not be best for that - miniscule though it is - money to go to the troops on the ground, as it were?

Mr HENDERSON: Again I will defer, the commissioner for advice on that issue.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. We believe it is important to get the right person in place to take the Northern Territory Emergency Services forward. I believe the decision to upgrade was the best possible decision for NTES.

Ms CARNEY: Is it the case that Emergency Services has 13 permanent staff?

Mr HENDERSON: My advice is 12.

Ms CARNEY: Twelve, okay. Twelve permanent staff; and about 500 volunteers in the Northern Territory? Just bear with me, please.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want confirmation on that 500?

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, yes. For the purposes of *Hansard*, sure.

Mr HENDERSON: The volunteer numbers fluctuate but ...

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but that is about it.

Commissioner WHITE: We can take that on notice if you wish a precise number.

Mr HENDERSON: It does fluctuate from time to time; location to location; and who is active in recruiting. However, if you want a specific number in time?

Ms CARNEY: No. We all know generally what it is. Can you answer this for me? Is it true - and it may not be - that Emergency Services gets hand-me-down vehicles from the police?

Mr HENDERSON: Hand-me-down vehicles? I do not know what you are implying there.

Ms CARNEY: Second-hand?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to Mr Mouatt, but any vehicles that are deployed to Emergency Services are adequate for the task.

Mr MOUATT: The vehicles we have are a mixture for sure, and some of them have been with other parts of the agency. Some are new and it depends on the requirements. It is also driven in part by the fluctuating number of volunteers. However, for the most part, our vehicles are resupplied on a normal basis as with any other agencies. Sometimes, we get a chance to fill gaps with some volunteer units with second-hand vehicles.

Ms CARNEY: When you say 'resupplied' does that mean second-hand?

Mr MOUATT: That is they are replaced on a normal basis as with police, fire ...

Ms CARNEY: That is new?

Mr MOUATT: Yes, that is correct.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so Emergency Services does have the ability to buy new vehicles and will have that capacity in 2006-07?

Mr MOUATT: That is correct.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. No more questions for that output thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: No questions, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 5.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other non-output specific budget related questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you confirm whether it is the case that research has been, or is currently being undertaken, into the public's perception of the Northern Territory Police? If that is the case, can you outline how much money has been allocated for the research, who is going to undertake it, and whether a certificate of exemption was issued?

Mr HENDERSON: I will defer that to the Police Commissioner for what is an operational and management question.

Commissioner WHITE: Thank you, minister. Yes, there is a review under way and it is looking at customer service ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry?

Commissioner WHITE: Looking at customer service and how we ...

Ms CARNEY: Customer?

Commissioner WHITE: ... how we improve our customer service. My understanding is that it is a consultancy. I do not have the specifics before me but it did go to tender. I am about to receive a report from the Territory-based consultant in relation to that review.

Ms CARNEY: It was about customer service?

Commissioner WHITE: Customer service, yes.

Ms CARNEY: What does that mean?

Commissioner WHITE: It is about how the Northern Territory Police Force is perceived, and how we can improve the quality of our services to the community, including how we market our services and how we respond to calls for assistance. In general terms, it is looking at customer service and delivering policing services to the community with an acknowledgement that as part of customer service we might need to market the police force and the services it provides.

Ms CARNEY: Does it follow that, in addition to Territorians money being used for recruitment campaigns, the money of Territorians clearly has been used for a review about the public perception of the police? Is it the case that Territorians' money might be used to market the Territory police in our communities? Are you suggesting that there is going to be a marketing campaign talking about how good the police service is?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: It is really about improving our service delivery to the community. It can include an upgrade to our Internet website, the way in which the public is able to access that Internet site and the quality of information contained therein. It is not an exercise in spending the money to make the Northern Territory Police Force look good if that is what is being put to me. It is more about making sure that our policing services and our service delivery remains relevant to policing in the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: How much did the consultancy cost?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: I am told it is approximately \$90 000, but I would like to take that on notice and provide a more accurate amount.

Question on Notice

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

Ms CARNEY: How much did the consultancy into the public's perception of the police service cost?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, you will take that question on notice?

Mr HENDERSON: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: And - I am sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 5.4. Please continue, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Did I hear, through you, minister, commissioner earlier that it was due shortly?

Commissioner WHITE: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, okay. In the next couple of months, that sort of thing?

Commissioner WHITE: No, in fact the next couple of weeks.

Ms CARNEY: Next couple of weeks, okay. Will you make that available to your minister?

Commissioner WHITE: It is a review that I commissioned. As in all these things, when the minister requests information that is provided to the minister's office. I suggest on this occasion, I would want to brief the minister in any event.

Ms CARNEY: How many other consultancies have you commissioned in the last 12 months?

Mr HENDERSON: We have that information here.

Ms CARNEY: If you have it in table form, which I assume you have prepared for Estimates, could you provide it? So consultancies, how much, the list? I gather there is a list. Thanks for that.

Mr HENDERSON: Yes, we can table that.

Ms CARNEY: Thanks for that. Is there a media unit within the police service?

Mr HENDERSON: I defer to the commissioner.

Commissioner WHITE: Yes, there is.

Ms CARNEY: How many people are in that unit?

Commissioner WHITE: One director at the ECO1 level, one manager at the AO8 level, one printing and publications officer at the AO5 level, two media liaison officers at the AO4 level, and one media liaison officer at the AO6 level in Alice Springs. The Media and Corporate Communications Section is responsible for both media and corporate communications. The greater majority of their work is spent on providing information to the media in relation to the activities of the tri-service. They do work around the clock, long hours, and they are subject to recall, and are very busy people.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I propose, members of the committee and the minister and his officers, that that will conclude this hearing here. On behalf of the committee, I thank officers from Police, Fire and Emergency Services who provided advice to the minister today.

Mr HENDERSON: Thank you.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER BURNS' PORTFOLIOS

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: 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 Planning and Infrastructure.

Dr BURNS: Thanks, Mr Deputy Chairman. It is a pleasure to be here tonight. I will make some introductions and then make an opening statement. The attendees who need to be introduced are, of course, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Ms Sarah Butterworth; Chief Financial Officer, Mr Ken Tinkham; Indigenous Infrastructure Unit Executive Director, Mr John Tobin; and Mr Gary Boyle, Director of Indigenous Essential Services.

There are others sitting behind me, Mr Deputy Chairman. I know that each knows that, when they come forward to the table, they will introduce themselves for the purposes of Hansard. Amongst those sitting behind me there are Land, Planning Executive Director, Mr Rod Applegate; Transport and Territory Roads Output's Executive Director, Mr Chris Bigg; Infrastructure Development Executive Director, Mr Neville Jones; the General Manager of Construction Division, a government business division, which is Paul Jones - I welcomed Paul to his first estimates from my memory anyway, here in the Northern Territory; the Darwin City Waterfront Redevelopment Project Chief Financial Officer, Mr Andrew Kirkman, and others associated with the waterfront project.

Mr Deputy Chairman, I will now move into my introductory statement. As I said, I will be joined at the table by other departmental officers as appropriate, as we move through the appropriation for the department. I point out it is, obviously, a large department with many output areas, and the way that I am organised here is by output areas rather than by output groups. I would appreciate moving through by particular output area.

Mr Deputy Chairman, land, transport and infrastructure are primary economic drivers which enable the Territory economy to diversify and grow. The Department of Planning and Infrastructure is the major generator of jobs in the Territory through the development of infrastructure projects both large and small. The department plays a significant role in delivering sustainable infrastructure solutions.

The CEO, Sarah Butterworth, has just completed her second year as Chief Executive Officer of the department, and it has been a year of great change with the split from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and the Environment, to become the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. This restructure resulted in a reduction in total budget of around \$92.105m and a total personnel of 488, which are now found within the budget area of NRETA. The restructure also changed the output structure for the department significantly by introducing a new Indigenous Infrastructure output.

It is worth remembering at the outset that the restructure also affected the distribution of corporate overheads. Some corporate costs were fixed and, whilst the department split roughly 54% Department of Planning and Infrastructure and 46% NRETA, the cost did not necessarily split in the same proportion. I point that out at the outset. Some costs stayed with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, such as

mainframe charges. All of these costs had to be reallocated across the department and be shown as increased expenditure against outputs.

The past financial year has been one of major achievement for the department in many areas. The work on the Darwin City Waterfront is now well under way. It has been my pleasure to visit that project a number of times over the last 12 months or so, and again within the last fortnight. This significant project is being carefully managed by the department.

The introduction of new procurement reforms for government has helped to facilitate major change in the Construction Division, a government business division which itself has undergone business process re-engineering to provide more efficient and effective delivery of construction services. Implementation of a new *Building Act* is reforming the construction industry and will provide for more robust development of industry and greater consumer protection.

The Transport Group have continued their work on reforms which will bring the Northern Territory in line with other states and territories, providing for a strong focus on road safety initiatives.

The Motor Vehicle Registry is continuing to develop more flexible ways for customers to make payments through online services and the use of phone payment technologies.

The department is also playing a major role in putting roads and communities back in action after the devastation of floods this Wet Season and Cyclone Monica, particularly those communities such as Ramingining and Maningrida.

The new Indigenous Infrastructure Unit is making headway in project managing community-based housing for indigenous communities on behalf of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. The associated Indigenous Construction Program is a strong focus of the unit, with a concentrated effort on employment and skills transfer in an industry which is experiencing shortages in skilled labour, particularly in remote locations.

Mr Deputy Chairman, I will handle any question the committee members may have with regard to any contractual issues for any capital works programs that are administered by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. Questions with regard to capital works programs that are in departments other than the Department of Planning and Infrastructure will need to be directed to the appropriate minister responsible for the particular project.

My responses for the waterfront project will relate to the operational matters that are within my portfolio responsibilities in advancing this important project. In the area of indigenous housing, my responses will relate to the project management of the construction of housing and related indigenous construction training initiatives, as well as relevant assets management for indigenous communities.

Mr Deputy Chairman, in conclusion, I look forward to any questions the committee may have with regard to the appropriation for this year.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions about the minister's speech?

Mr MILLS: That was a lovely speech, thank you, minister.

Minister, the questions I would like to ask at the beginning are just some overarching questions to get them out of the way. The opposition, on behalf of the Territory community, is particularly interested in the number of reviews that currently sit with government. Are you able to provide a list of reviews that are to be publicly reported, their titles, a little history about each of those reviews that sit underneath your care?

Dr BURNS: I will undertake to get you the answer to that question, member for Blain, but I do not believe I have a ready answer for that across the department. Would you like to comment, Ms Butterworth?

Ms BUTTERWORTH: No. This has been a regular question so we did try to determine whether we had any. We could not actually think of any that would be publicly released.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Did you wish to take that question on notice, minister?

Dr BURNS: We will take it on notice. For example, there is one review, if you like, that is of particular interest to me in my portfolio areas. It is a review of road safety by a road safety task force that consists of departmental officers across a range of departments, is this the sort of review that you are referring to?

Mr MILLS: It is that sort of thing. From time to time, issues are responded to by saying: 'We are conducting a review into this or that'. It just alerted opposition that it is probably a good time to do an audit so that we know exactly how many reviews there are so that we can assist you in discharging your responsibilities to complete those reviews and report in a timely manner.

Dr BURNS: We will undertake to do that, member for Blain. Another review that comes to my mind - I suppose I am thinking of major reviews here - is into the Construction Division. I am more than happy to talk about that when we get there. We are very interested in having quality assurance within the Construction Division around the process of developing projects and tenders and, I suppose, quality issues around costs and a whole range of things. That is an internal review that is going on that is of importance. There are probably other reviews going on within the department. I will undertake to get you a list of those.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that. Other agencies that we have asked have been able - I do not expect it be handed across the table immediately. I ask on notice if we could have a complete list of all reports and reviews and inquiries that are to be publicly reported?

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I ask you to restate the question.

Mr MILLS: I request of the minister, within this department, every review or inquiry that is to be publicly reported. The opposition requests details of the nature of the review in terms of its time, how long it has been in operation, when it will report, and at what stage that review is currently at?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate No 7.1 to it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, just one more, minister, before I pass on to my colleagues on the panel. The question of communications, an important role for any department: could you please describe the communications capacity of your department?

Dr BURNS: There is relatively small unit within DPI that is involved in communications, and they have a range of duties. For instance, regarding the Little Mindil tourist resort proposal, they have been the ones that have been communicating to the press on behalf of the department in relation to that. Ms Butterworth has given me a list of what is involved in our communications unit. It currently consists of four permanent positions and offers a broad range of services:

- media liaison, I think I have mentioned that in relation to a specific project;
- advertising management, which is an important one because the majority of the department's advertising is booked and coordinated by the marketing and communication unit. This includes print, radio, television advertising both locally and interstate. That could be on a whole range of issues to do with the business of the department;
- the production of both external and internal publications is managed within the unit;
- event management such as the show circuit, Tropical Gardens Spectacular, Freds Pass Show, Careers Expo, and internal communications. They manage a range of internal communications material including the CEO's newsletter, and running communications network for staff across the agency;
- community engagement, the key source of advice for our internal clients on community engagement and how they should consult with the community;

- sponsorship management to manage the department's sponsorship budget and liaise as appropriate with those organisations that are being sponsored;
- marketing and communication campaigns to provide and advice and management on a broad range of external campaign on behalf of our internal clients. These range from the road safety campaign to residential building reform to litter abatement strategies. That now probably fits it within NRETA; and
- training to facilitate communications and Internet and Intranet communication in preparing written material for both Internet and Intranet and approving all new stories and community consultation pages.

Mr MILLS: That is a big job for that four people.

Dr BURNS: Well, it is a large department. It does have quite a large interface with the media and other aspects. Maybe Ms Butterworth would like to enlarge on this?

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister.

Ms BUTTERWORTH: Most of the core functions are carried out in that unit. There is still a fair amount of the work done by the business units themselves with assistance from communications. There is one that I have realised I have forgotten on here, and that is there is a communications manager for the waterfront which is in addition to this. That does everything in relation to the waterfront. The budget for that group is \$502 000. The manager is an AO8, there is an AO6 media officer, and two AO5s, and the Waterfront Communications Manager is an AO8.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Do I understand that within the agencies there is also communications capacity?

Ms BUTTERWORTH: No, not now particularly. The people who are responsible for the program are involved in the communications function.

Mr MILLS: So there is usually a resource attached to the delivery of that program which works with that agency?

Ms BUTTERWORTH: That is right; yes.

Mr MILLS: Just interested to ...

Dr BURNS: Excuse me a minute, member for Blain?

Mr MILLS: Certainly.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, I ask that witnesses state their title and name. It is very hard for the Hansard people. I also ask members to address their questions through the Chair. Thank you.

Mr MILLS: I am sorry. Through the Chair, my question arises from something I heard in your reply there, minister. What is the size of the sponsorship budget, and can you provide further details of that budget?

Dr BURNS: I would be more than happy to do that, member for Blain. I am not sure that we have that on hand, Mr Tinkham, have we?

Mr TINKHAM: No, I am afraid not.

Dr BURNS: Do you have an idea of the quantum of that budget?

Mr TINKHAM: Ken Tinkham, Chief Financial Officer. The budget is very small, I can assure you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you like to take that on notice?

Mr TINKHAM: Yes, we will have to take it on notice.

Dr BURNS: Yes, I am prepared ...

Mr MILLS: I am interested as an active local member in this. I am more than happy to have that provided on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, are you prepared to accept that?

Dr BURNS: Yes, of course.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, member for Blain, could you please repeat the question?

Mr MILLS: Through the Chair, I requested the minister for details regarding the sponsorship budget. That is not only the amount, but some of the past history of beneficiaries of the sponsorship budget.

Dr BURNS: Bearing in mind, member for Blain, that I suppose with the split of the departments, the sponsorship for 2004-05 might be quite different from 2005-06 and so on. 2006-07 ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you need to clarify that?

Dr BURNS: Anyway, we will provide that information for you.

Mr MILLS: I will take what you receive and then I will take it from there. I may make further inquiries.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate question No 7.2 to it.

Mr MILLS: That is enough from me at the moment.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Are we on general questions or are you taking ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, we are. We have not moved on to the output groups yet.

Dr LIM: No. I have no general questions.

Mr WOOD: This is my one in-depth question for the night. Minister, I have wondered why the Department of Lands and Planning has now become the Department of Planning and Lands. Can you tell us the logic behind this brilliant move in name title? Is there a reason why the department would change its name?

Dr BURNS: It was something that the Administrator gave me, member for Nelson, so I accepted it without question. It still means the same.

Mr WOOD: It came from the Administrator?

Dr BURNS: I suppose the Administrative Orders come through the Administrator so ...

Mr WOOD: I have always wondered about the logic, that was all. Obviously, it still is not there. But anyway, thank you.

Dr BURNS: I must confess that I get the horse before the cart sometimes too, member for Nelson. I know what you are saying.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Through the Chair. Any other questions? That being the conclusion, the committee will now consider the estimates in proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – INDIGENOUS INFRASTRUCTURE
Output 1.1 – Indigenous Essential Services

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Indigenous Infrastructure, Output 1.1, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, I note that the Indigenous Infrastructure is now under your management rather than as previously under another minister. In Indigenous Infrastructure, you have essential services, land use, planning, and housing construction. Can you explain to me what each specific output group is supposed to do?

Dr BURNS: I thought, member for Greatorex, that we were moving through output group by output group.

Dr LIM: I am talking about Indigenous Infrastructure. That is 1.0.

Dr BURNS: Yes. I do not mind giving an overview. Of course, I do not. Obviously, Indigenous Essential Services is mainly concerned with the provision of essential services to indigenous communities - mainly power, water and sewerage. Those are very important functions and, as I have said on the public record a number of times, these are very important foundations for health. They are very important services to be delivered to indigenous communities.

Land use planning is all about the so-call slap plans where their future planning is looked at by community – where the land situated where future development might take place, particularly around the headworks and provision of infrastructure. I will let others elaborate on this a little. Indigenous housing construction, as it relates to the role of this department, is not so much in the policy areas because that lies with minister McAdam in his portfolio area. We are more involved in the construction of indigenous housing on communities. I ask Mr Boyle or Mr Tobin to elaborate further if you desire.

Mr BOYLE: Gary Boyle, Director of Indigenous Essential Services, through the Chair. Indigenous Essential Services is the purchaser of essential services on behalf of remote and indigenous communities through our service providers, currently Power and Water Corporation or Power and Water Sewerage Services to those communities, and through the Construction Division for aerodrome and barge landing maintenance for remote aerodrome barge landing program.

Dr BURNS: Did you want to just go through the other ones that the member for Greatorex mentioned?

Mr TOBIN: John Tobin, acting Senior Director of Indigenous Infrastructure. The land use plan function, Dr Lim, is providing for the provision of service land for the housing and construction in communities. In the larger communities, it has been in community consultation to take that a step further to go to land use strategic plan,. It is akin to an area plan, if you like, in negotiation with the traditional landowners and the community council in general to identify uses for the land in the community. This is to identify land for residential development, for instance, compared to light industrial and commercial development and utility services, and reserving other land as open space. It also has that function. It is akin to a community area plan.

The Indigenous Housing Construction also has an element that tends to construction training in housing. There are a number of houses where there is an identified program that is put to a community to say there is enough continuity of work there to provide trainees with on-the-job training for a number of years leading to a certificate. At the moment, we have been providing training leading to certificates in general construction or a repairs and maintenance function, which is a new emphasis that we are trying to put on the program moving into the future because that is the most sustainable element of the employment in the communities. As you are aware, we have R&M requirements in communities more or less continuously, whereas construction is, of its nature, necessarily lumpy.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I am not addressing the specific output groups - still in a very general question. When the minister said Indigenous Housing Construction is about construction of homes on this land - you talk about planning the construction; you are not talking the actual construction or purchasing the homes and purchasing material, buying the labour, building the homes out there. You only have about \$1.28m.

Dr BURNS: This is the agency that provides the support, a bit like a construction agency. Dr Lim, the Construction Division will be taking a far greater role. I am more than happy to talk about this when we get

to the particular output area. However, the Construction Division has a discrete budget that does not really reflect the total infrastructure spend. It is an agency that provides the planning, the design, and the project management for things, similarly with this particular unit here. That is its function, Dr Lim. I am just flagging that it is proposed that the Construction Division will take over more of the construction activity for houses on indigenous communities, away from the indigenous community housing organisations, because there has been a demonstrated lack of capacity with some of the ICHOs to deliver. Government is taking the delivery of housing on indigenous communities very seriously. That is why we are prepared to move more into the direct project management role.

I would much prefer if we could come to that specifically when we come to indigenous housing construction as a discrete output area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You will get your chance then, member for Grotorex. Any other questions of a general nature?

Dr LIM: Not for now.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Dr LIM: 1.0.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Output 1.0, sorry. I am sorry, it is a misprint here. We are on consideration of Output 1.1, Indigenous Essential Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, I note that in the budget book for 2006-07, you commented on the variation of nearly \$10m decrease in essential services; that being the removal of the diesel subsidy. With the price of fuel going up so significantly in the last few months, and likely to keep on going, have you factored that into your \$56m?

Dr BURNS: I will pass this question over to others, but I can speak in general terms about it, member for Grotorex. Rising fuel prices have been a challenge for the government in the delivery of indigenous essential services in remote areas. From memory, there was some substantial increase in that particular area over the past 12 months. The \$50.8m that was in the 2005-06 original budget was then increased by revised estimate of 2005-06 to about \$64m; \$10.6m of that was about the diesel fuel grants. Then, the difference between \$64m and \$54m was the fact that, from 2006-07 the federal government removed the diesel fuel excise, which totals about \$10m. It is my understanding also that that change has not gone through federal parliament yet. We are expecting that.

I will hand over to others who might want to comment on these figures and on the question that you have asked, because it is an important question, member for Grotorex. Mr Boyle.

Mr BOYLE: It is true that a very large proportion of our budget is used on diesel fuel for power generation in the remote communities. The costs have been rising significantly over the last two years, and the \$10.7m additional funding for this year is representative of that plus a small percentage for increase in growth of electricity demand.

At the moment, our best advice on the removal of fuel excise is, as the minister said, in the order of \$10m or what it would equate to based on current usage. It was first flagged in *Securing Australia's Energy Future*, the White Paper produced by the Australian government in June 2004. The Fuel Tax Bill 2006 has been presented and read for the first time and, while that legislation will not be in place by 1 July, it is our advice that we would expect it to apply retrospectively from 1 July.

Dr LIM: You commented about providing electricity into indigenous communities. In fact, you are contracting Power and Water to supply the electricity. Do you provide them with the funding? Do you provide Aboriginal communities with the funding to purchase electricity from Power and Water.

Dr BURNS: I believe it is an arrangement with Power and Water. Mr Boyle, is that an appropriate question for you?

Mr BOYLE: Yes, it is. We engage Power and Water under the purchaser/provider model. Effectively, Power and Water Corporation is under contract to us to provide essential services in the remote communities that the Northern Territory government funds. That includes electricity provision. Our job is really about the coordination of funding at different times as money is made available from the Australian

government for different aspects, and that allows Power and Water to get on with their job as a contractor for providing a service.

Dr LIM: I note that, for instance, Hermannsburg has now solar array, which harbours solar energy and supplies something like 50%, and that they have been able to cut down the diesel cost by 50%. Are you rolling out solar arrays across the Territory?

Dr BURNS: I would like to comment on that, Dr Lim. I know this will be of particular interest to the member for Macdonnell. That is a very exciting project. To some degree, that project is being funded from a whole range of sources. When I visited Hermannsburg, probably 18 months ago, I got a full briefing on this particular project. My recollection is that it only produces a fraction of the power required by that community, it is still not cost-effective and that, probably, Hermannsburg, regarding the diesel generation, was somewhere down to 20¢ per kilowatt hour, whereas the solar array was far in excess of that.

However, it is exciting technology. A lot of it is being funded by the European Union, and they are sinking significant investment in that, and the efficiencies are increasing all the time. At this stage, even over the life of the project and amortising the significant investment of those arrays - because each one is worth maybe \$1m or several hundred thousand dollars - over the life of the project, the power costs per unit are still significantly high. It is something we are involved in, we want to have a greater involvement but, at this stage, it is not as cost-effective as we would like it. I hope that answers your question.

Dr LIM: Well, it does to a degree. The capital infrastructure is, obviously, the expensive part. However, from the Hermannsburg community's point of view, spending half the previous cost of diesel is very beneficial to the members of the community.

Dr BURNS: That is right. We are always looking at ways of reducing diesel consumption on communities, not least of all because of the cost, but also because of greenhouse issues. As you would be aware, there are a number of trials at Kings Canyon and Bulman. I do not believe that they were with fixed arrays, or that they were as successful as we would have liked. However, we have to keep trying. I am not sure if Mr Boyle wants to comment further on some of these solar trials.

Mr BOYLE: The solar arrays are very exciting technology; they have won engineering excellence awards. The investment in capital infrastructure for those sites is not from the Northern Territory government; it is largely private money put forward by a range of groups, supplemented by Australian government funding for renewable energy. It does offset the diesel consumption in communities where those solar arrays are to be installed. At the moment, there is the one at Hermannsburg, the site at Yuendumu has been commissioned, and there is another one under construction at Lajamanu. The arrangement for the solar power provision from those sites is through our service provider, Power and Water, so we do not have a direct arrangement with the provider. My understanding is that the private provider has a commercial agreement with Power and Water where they will investigate a number of further sites, predominantly in Central Australia.

Dr LIM: Moving away from solar arrays to solar panel and hybrid systems in the communities, there are systems, for instance, provided through the Centre for Appropriate Technology where solar cells are harvesting solar energy to charge the batteries augmented with diesel generation. How much of the roll-out has there been?

Dr BURNS: That might be a question more appropriate for Power and Water Authority. I remember when I was minister for Power and Water that particularly the Kings Canyon and Bulman fixed arrays fell within that portfolio area. It is not that I am trying to evade the question, but those trials are more within Power and Water's purview, member for Grotter.

Dr LIM: I am sure Power and Water would be preparing themselves to answer that question too. However, as the minister for Indigenous Essential Services, there must be a responsibility within your portfolio that you look at that and encourage it, not provide some form of CSO to get Power and Water to develop those types of electricity supply in the bush?

Dr BURNS: Power and Water is undertaking some of these trials, such as Bulman and Kings Canyon I mentioned. They funded those trials and they are certainly working very cooperatively with the group that is doing the solar arrays at Hermannsburg. Regarding my position as minister, of course, I would be encouraging greater use of solar power. We are all keen to see alternate uses of power right Australia. I suppose we are focusing on indigenous communities here, but there is a challenge for Australia which seems a fairly wanton producer of greenhouse gases. The issue of whether we are going to sign the Kyoto

Protocol is probably an issue for the federal government. As a government, we have lent our support for the Kyoto Protocol and, as a nation, not just as a Territory, we need to look at our production of greenhouse gases and the cost of producing energy.

Dr LIM: Moving on. Regarding water services, recently Yuendumu complained again about the quality of the water and the content of radioactivity in the water. What has the Northern Territory government done about that?

Dr BURNS: I suppose I can talk as a former Power and Water minister. I know you had minister Henderson earlier today and I am not sure whether you directed the same questions towards him. Regarding the water quality and potable water that the communities have, it is really something that Power and Water have responsibility for. We have to take into account that a lot of remote communities do live in very harsh areas with problematic water supplies that contain a lot of different elements. Some of them, as you say, including radioactive elements. However, to my knowledge when I was minister for Power and Water and now as minister for Indigenous Essential Services, there is no community where the levels of any harmful element exceed the recommended limits. They are NHMRC guidelines.

At a community level, Power and Water undertakes to do a whole range of things. They may blend water from various bores. It is a challenge, member for Grotto. Some of these communities live right on the edge of rainfall areas so it is very hard to collect water into dams and store that over the Dry Season. Some of the water supplies through bores is very hard water and, sometimes, contains elements that could be problematic. We are doing our best and I know that continues back to the previous government. It has always been a challenge for government to provide potable water in these communities. I am not sure whether you would like to comment further, Mr Boyle?

Mr BOYLE: I can, minister, if you would like me to. Yuendumu did have an issue that reached the media in relation to its water quality. That was an unfortunate incident for the community because it raised a lot of fear within the people when it hit the media. What was not reported accurately was the fact that the water supplied at the tap is well within the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines for uranium. It is true that there are several bores within the bore field that exceed the uranium levels. When that became apparent in late 1999, government undertook a program in conjunction with Power and Water to develop a new bore field at Mt Eclipse at a cost of around about \$1.5m, with an aquifer that did not contain uranium. Unfortunately for us in that scenario, the drinking water guideline added extra parameters and there were some parameters in the new bore field that were now out of specification level.

At the moment, in conjunction, with the Department of Health as the regulator for water supply, we provide a blended mix from a range of bores to the community and that blend is well within the guidelines.

Dr LIM: Minister, there is no value in reverse osmosis in this instance?

Dr BURNS: As you would be aware, reverse osmosis is a relatively expensive process. It was my pleasure when I was the Essential Services minister to look at the reverse osmosis unit at Yulara. That is very interesting. I found it particularly so from a chemical point of view. However, it is a very expensive process. It is an arrangement that could be considered when everything else fails but, at present, as Mr Boyle has pointed out, we are able to blend the water and it is within parameters. Reverse osmosis would be something that we could consider after a number of other options have been exhausted.

Dr LIM: Have any studies been done looking at the water quality versus health outcomes?

Dr BURNS: Those studies are really something that occur through the NHMRC so, when they set the limits within the water - and all that testing, by the way, is done through Power and Water, not done through this agency - it is the NHMRC and the medical experts that set those limits. We always aim to come under several orders of magnitude under those limits, Dr Lim. The limits in those studies are done at another level and we must trust the NHMRC and the limits they set.

Dr LIM: I am glad you trust the medical experts so thoroughly, minister. If I can move on to another issue I recall - I cannot remember the community but I think it was Yuelamu that ran out of water. Water was then carted to Yuelamu. Am I right; is that the community that ran out of water?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Yes. Is the Northern Territory government still carting water to Yuelamu?

Dr BURNS: I will have to get advice on that Dr Lim. To give a background, that community is served by a dam. The exact cause of why that dam was leaking or water was being lost from that dam - some said the clay pan underneath the dam had been breached by a bulldozer; others were saying there had been works done around the airstrip which is part of the catchment for that dam and that water was not being diverted correctly into the dam; others were maintaining it was because it had been fenced stock had been excluded from the area and there was quite a lot of growth of grass around the dam that was affecting drawing water out of there. It was a quite serious situation. I went to Cabinet with a number of measures to remediate the dam. I understand there has been quite healthy rainfall in Central Australia and I hope the dam is full. From memory, government spent about \$900 000 or thereabouts on remediation of the dam and putting works and other things around it. However, I will pass on to Mr Boyle if the water situation regarding bottle water is persisting in that community.

Mr BOYLE: Yuelamu is still receiving packaged drinking water, but it is drinking water only. The main water supply for general use is from a very salty bore located in the centre of the community. At this stage, there has been some rain, as the minister has flagged, but because we have an established process at the moment the dam does not have enough water to warrant switching back to a service supply and then, most likely very short-term, having to switch back to importing drinking water.

The decision was made that it is best to continue people in a system they are familiar with now, and which they accept and are happy with. The Health Department is happy with it because it provides a portable and hygienic drinking water supply to people in their own homes.

Dr LIM: I am sure the costs in the overall Territory budget is minuscule, but could you give me a ballpark figure as to what it costs each year to do this? How long do you think it will go on for, minister?

Dr BURNS: I will ask Mr Boyle to respond to this. As you said, member for Greatorex, this is a minuscule part of the budget. I will emphasise again before Mr Boyle responds that we have undertaken remedial works. It is a shame the dam is not filled but, maybe, it is going to take a couple of Wet Season cycles to do that. Maybe in the interim, Mr Boyle could give an idea of the costs.

Mr BOYLE: The cost varies a little due to climatic conditions. Some of the usage goes up a little and has dropped off a little, but it is in the order of \$2000 a week, including freight.

Dr LIM: \$2000 a week?

Mr BOYLE: Yes.

Dr BURNS: I emphasise again - maybe Mr Boyle could talk about it - it was about \$900 000. Is that correct? Maybe you could inform the member for Greatorex the works that have been carried out so that we can have a more reliant water supply in that particular community.

Mr BOYLE: There is a raft of works that have been initiated; some completed; and some are still to be actioned. The initial phase of the program was to commence drilling for what could have been further potable water supplies in the area. A number of bore holes were sunk. Unfortunately, none were of a potable nature and the two that did yield some water – very high but we intend to use those as a back-up should the other very salty bore failed.

As the minister indicated before, a number of things regarding the catchment have been looked at and will be actioned. When the aerodrome was constructed, probably not enough thought at the time was given to how that impacted on the drainage within the catchment and, for large rainfall events, that currently blocks about 10% of the catchment. There is a project that will put a culvert underneath the aerodrome which will allow that water to flow through from the upper end of the catchment to the main part of the dam.

Because the dam is located in the desert, we have a very large problem with evaporation. It is in the order of 3000 mm per year with a very small rainfall. Part of the mitigation works is to significantly deepen an excavated component near the dam wall to increase our storage volume while decreasing our evaporation ratio to the surface area. We need to look at managing the vegetation in the catchment to improve the run-off characteristics. At this stage, those works were expected to have been actioned by now.

The intent was to maximise the indigenous employment and training outcomes from that project, and the community had a very firm resolution to move forward and be very involved with those works. Over time, they have realised that they do not have the capacity to do that, and we are now going back through a

program with our service provider, Power and Water, to engage an external project manager on behalf of the community to work for the community and get the remainder of the works under way. At this stage, that has been a select tender, and Power and Water are waiting for a decision from the Procurement Review Board.

Dr BURNS: Mr Boyle, I recall also at one stage, you were examining the use of an inert monolayer to decrease evaporation. Could you report on that as well, please? As Mr Boyle said, evaporation is a significant loss component for this particular water supply.

Mr BOYLE: Evaporation is extremely high, as we mentioned. There has been some work undertaken by Queensland Water Resources and private consultants, looking at a range of evaporative control measures. One of the things that we had thought would offer a very economical and quite reasonable return was the application of a chemical layer to the surface waters of the dam, particularly when the dam level recedes to the excavated sump. Further discussions with the research agencies in Queensland which have been working on that have indicated that it is probably not the best way to go and there is probably a simpler, more effective method. They have suggested something in the order of bolting used car tyres together and covering those with shade cloth which could be undertaken as a community project. It would probably give a much more significant saving in evaporation, rather than relying on a chemical layer at this time.

Dr LIM: Those of us living in Central Australia understand about the high evaporation rate; we all suffer that, whether you have a dam in a bush community or a swimming pool in an urban back yard. One is for survival and the other is for pleasure.

I move on from there and move away from Yuelamu. Are there any other communities under threat such as Yuelamu has suffered?

Dr BURNS: I am not aware of any, member for Greatorex. I suppose, as various communities grow and demands on water in particular grow, which is essential to life, I guess there could be other communities that fall into that bracket. I will pass to Mr Boyle on this particular question, which is a very important question.

Mr BOYLE: Yuelamu is the only community we have with a dam of that nature that has experienced those problems. As the minister has indicated, there are a number of communities where, as the community grows and its demand increases, there will be a need to increase capacity of the bore systems. In some instances, that will be a program of drilling additional bores and equipping those to supply the water to the community. In some communities where that may not be possible, it may mean looking further afield for an additional bore field, such as we did at Yuendumu, to tap into a different aquifer.

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that there are some communities that are being investigated at the moment?

Dr BURNS: I think Mr Boyle is saying is that his area keeps a watching brief on communities and their water supplies and usage. What he is saying is that, basically, that watching brief continues. Even some of the larger coastal communities, as they grow, their water supply increases and the government has to, and does, invest in infrastructure such as tanks and new bores and whatever. It all comes down to strategic planning, Dr Lim. That would be my answer to that particular question. As far as I am aware, there is no community other than Yuelamu that has an acute problem.

Dr LIM: I would like the minister to comment on the entry under Essential Services, water supplied per head based, there is an expected increase in water supply ...

Dr BURNS: This is Performance Measures ...

Dr LIM: Yes, Performance Measures.

Dr BURNS: ... on the table on the page 155?

Dr LIM: Correct, 305 to 320 and, in sewage treated, 124 to 130 ...

Dr BURNS: So you ...

Dr LIM: For per person there is a significant increase. I would have expected that per person would have relatively the same levels of consumption and output year by year?

Dr BURNS: I will hand to Mr Boyle. Are you talking about just the water supply and the population ...

Dr LIM: And the sewerage as well ...

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Dr LIM: There is this increase. Can you explain that?

Mr BOYLE: The population has been growing in remote communities at around about 2% per annum on the long-term average. Typically, our long-term average for growth in service demand is 5% to 7%. The figures reflected there are at that 5% long-term average. Even if population was not to change dramatically, the construction program to decrease, basically, the number of people per house means that, with additional housing coming on, there are many more fixtures that are being used within a house. Unfortunately, at the moment, the condition of plumbing in many indigenous houses is not as well maintained as it could be, and there is significant wastage through those fixtures. While theoretically more fixtures for the same number of people should not lead to a greater demand, it does because they are more taps that children may leave on and things like that.

Dr BURNS: It is important to note that this is not an exact science. We know the Aboriginal population is a very mobile population, that the numbers per house are often guesstimates - there is a lot of flux there. In a way, to some degree, these are best guess scenarios that the department has employed. I suppose, to some degree, they are trying to give some room in there in the provision of infrastructure. Would that be the correct interpretation, Mr Boyle?

Dr LIM: I have one last question, Mr Deputy Chairman, and then I am done. There was a community or two that had children breaking through sewage ponds fencing and accessing the water there unknowingly. Has it all been rectified and prevented from future occurrences?

Dr BURNS: I will take that question, Dr Lim. I believe that is a perennial problem, even around large towns with people wanting to hunt in and around sewage ponds, etcetera. I know Power and Water are very vigilant to try and stop this. I suppose kids do squeeze by in some instances. I also take the opportunity to commend the remote Essential Services officers; they are very dedicated people and they are always vigilant. I have done many a tour with them on the remote communities. We go down the sewage ponds, and they talk about security around the sewage ponds and the importance of retaining vigilance there.

Before we move on to another area, I also commend the Essential Services officers in the community, particularly those who were involved in Cyclone Monica. I know at Maningrida, Mr Vern Peck was widely praised by that community. He got power on very quickly and rectified the sewerage works. It just makes you realise the importance of these people. Vern has been there 30 years and he does a fantastic job. There are many like him throughout the Territory and I, for one, take my hat off to them.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Dr LIM: No, thank you.

Mr WOOD: I have a simple one. Minister, why is not Indigenous Essential Services with the Minister for Essential Services?

Dr BURNS: I suppose, to some degree, it comes down to government policy and strategy. It was felt that there should be a consolidation of the infrastructure issues within the portfolio areas for which I am minister. Housing and Construction and Indigenous Essential Services were the two areas. That is why it was decided to do that.

To some degree, you need a split between the service provider, if you like, which is Power and Water, and the buyer of the services. That is what used to occur before, because this particular group was in the Department of Local Government and Housing. It has come across to my area, but there always has been that split between the purchaser and the provider. To some degree, it is a policy decision.

Mr WOOD: Doesn't Power and Water have a separate company to supply services to remote communities to do that very split you are talking about?

Dr BURNS: They may have that but, in the set-up, the purchaser/provider set-up, it has always been desirable, as far as I am aware, to have the two separate. Possibly Mr Boyle or Mr Tinkham might want to answer this question.

Mr WOOD: You said it was a policy question, minister.

Mr TOBIN: I will give a quick comment. Yes, it is correct that Power and Water has a subsidiary company, IES Pty Ltd, which operates at cost. It is not earning a return on the assets; it is contracted to provide these services in the remote communities. That sets up the basis for a purchaser and provider arrangement. It is also apparent that the major infrastructure need in those communities is indigenous housing, so that also aligns itself with saying let us have the essential services sitting side by side with the land servicing and the housing construction program. In that line, it provides an efficiency.

Mr WOOD: What happens at places like Daly River, which serves as both an indigenous community and a farm area, and places like Ti Tree, which has the same sort of design in power. Who runs those?

Dr BURNS: It varies from place to place. From memory, I think the Indigenous Essential Services were responsible for the provision of the new generator plant at Daly River. You could possibly elaborate further on that, Mr Tobin or Mr Boyle.

Mr TOBIN: In general - and Mr Boyle might like to elaborate further on this - there are communities that are attached to what we call Power and Water's commercial networks, commercial grids. They have internal accounting treatment as to what is the commercial arm and what part of the service is being provided through IES Pty Ltd. Of course, then there is a reciprocal or a mirror arrangement for purchasing through DPI.

Mr WOOD: Well, are there any indigenous communities that Power and Water look after?

Dr BURNS: I am not sure. I do not believe so, member for Nelson. There are a number of communities in the bracket that you are talking about. Probably Borroloola is another one where you have a township and you have some indigenous communities close by. I suppose it is a judgment call. I am not really sure that there is a discrete community that is served by Power and Water. However, I might stand corrected on that. Are you aware of any, Mr Boyle?

Mr BOYLE: Over a long period of time there has been a range of arrangements in place that still exist. As has been indicated, Power and Water commercial services provide service to some communities close to open townships up to a boundary and, then, there is some transfer of responsibility for the internal operation of those services back to the Indigenous Essential Services component. As you flagged with Daly River, it was previously part of the Indigenous Essential Services program, and still is but, currently, now has some other consumers connected to that system. I guess there is a range of situations at the moment.

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, I suppose there is another important issue that leads on from what you say, and some of the areas that the member for Greaterrex has been questioning, is the whole issue of the provision of essential services to outstations. As most in the room would be aware, the Commonwealth is responsible for the provision of essential services to the majority of outstations throughout the Territory. Currently, there are negotiations, and there has been for some time, between the Territory government and the Commonwealth about the longer-term future of that. We do get instances where the sewerage pump or the bore pump on outstations that have been set up and funded by the Commonwealth breaks down, and Power and Water go out there and fix it for them even though it is not the Northern Territory government's responsibility, because the Commonwealth just does not seem to want to act on some of those things. It is a very important area and it is one that we need to work closely with the Commonwealth on to try to look at the longer-term view.

Mr WOOD: I am just probably trying to clarify in my mind how all this works. The government pays the community service obligation to Power and Water to provide power for Aboriginal communities. That is the way I always thought it was. How does that fit within what you are doing?

Dr BURNS: Power and Water pays community service obligations throughout the Territory. There are a lot of places up and down the track that are not necessarily Aboriginal communities where Power and

Water generates the power but people are still paying the same tariff as those in Darwin and Palmerston. There are CSOs right across the Territory. I suppose the extent of the CSO depends on how remote the place is.

Mr WOOD: I suppose I am trying to get at, through the Chair, whether there are any inefficiencies in having two lots of people provide similar services throughout the Territory?

Dr BURNS: I do not believe so. I believe it is a good system the way it is. I do not see any reason to change it. I am not aware of any inefficiencies. They certainly were not pointed out to me as minister for Power and Water and now minister for Indigenous Essential Services. The arrangement with Power and Water is one that is extended before the life of this government. It is probably quite a wise arrangement and I do not see any reason to change it unless, as you say, there were major inefficiencies pointed out.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions relating to Output 1.1? If there are not, I will conclude consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Indigenous Land Use Planning

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.2, Indigenous Land Use Planning. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Just one question Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, I would like you to describe in detail what the indigenous planning does?

Dr BURNS: Member for Grotorex, when we began at this output group you asked me to elaborate on each one. I did to the best of my ability, and I asked Mr Boyle to do that. However, I will ask Mr Boyle or Mr Tobin again to elaborate further if you ...

Dr LIM: If there is nothing to add it does not matter.

Dr BURNS: No.

Dr LIM: I thought you said you would like to talk about when we get to specific output groups, but you do not have to.

Dr BURNS: No, I spoke specifically about housing construction.

Dr LIM: Okay; we can skip that altogether.

Dr LIM: All done; I am fine, thank you.

Mr WOOD: One question similar to the first question. What is the difference between indigenous land use and planning and ordinary land use and planning, as is in the department?

Dr BURNS: I will pass to Mr Tobin or Mr Boyle on this. The land tenure issues are certainly often a lot different, as are the dynamics of the local authorities. As Mr Tobin pointed out, it is important the land use planning integrates very closely with the provision of infrastructure in headworks. It is fairly specialised knowledge and I am pleased there is a repository in the Indigenous Infrastructure area. However, would you like to elaborate Mr Tobin?

Mr TOBIN: The land use planning function in Indigenous Infrastructure provides the planning services to facilitate the housing program. It also facilitates planning for construction of government assets in indigenous communities. The housing component of it provides the planning and approval processes for about 80 lots per year to be developed so the housing program can be delivered in a timely manner. As you are aware, there were recent amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* that provide for the traditional owners to enter into long-term head-leasing, which may mean there will be more of a mainstream planning function required in a more formalised structure to land use planning in those communities in the future. I believe there will be a lot closer work between those two units if, in fact, they do not become one unit to operate together in regard to those specific communities where traditional owners wish to pursue the objective of the head-lease.

Mr WOOD: I know in years gone by when I worked on Bathurst Island, the council did most of the planning – it was a lucky council in those days. We did not split it in this manner; we expected the department to give us the advice. I wonder whether there is duplication.

I take the example again of Daly River; on one hand you have one part of the department working out the design for the development in the farm area where there has been subdivisions and there is a township site. Down the road, you have an Aboriginal community and a different group running it - indigenous land use planning. I ask the question again: why are these not one land use planning group, as they do deal with land management. Surely, you can have skilled people in Aboriginal areas under land management who can do the same job?

Dr BURNS: It is a policy decision, member for Nelson, in that government wants to focus on the provision of infrastructure, essential services, and housing construction on indigenous communities. It is a focus of government to provide that. It is not inconsistent to have a separate area within quite a large department devoted to this to ensure these things are being done and that there is a focus and close integration with Aboriginal communities to achieve common goals.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions relating to Output 1.2? That being the case, then that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Indigenous Housing Construction

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.3, Indigenous Housing Construction. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I invite the minister to explain the functions of Indigenous Housing Construction.

Dr BURNS: I gave a very short description before that this particular area has, as its focus, the construction of housing on indigenous communities and, as Mr Tobin also pointed out, a significant amount of its work is focused on skills training and providing job opportunities for Aboriginal people on remote communities.

The Department of Local Government has developed a four-year rolling construction program in indigenous housing that has a total value of approximately \$130m. In the past, the Indigenous Housing Construction program has been delivered primarily by way of grants to indigenous community housing organisations or ICHOs, which I mentioned before. Each ICHO was responsible for contracting its own project manager and builder. Achieving 100% budget expenditure of the housing construction budget has proven difficult to achieve using delivery through ICHOs, and DPI will deliver a proportion – about \$15m – of the 2006-07 program using Construction Division in order to deliver construction in a timely manner.

A program to deliver local training and housing construction was introduced in Central Australia in 2003 and, in 2006-07, it is planned to expand this program into additional communities, providing training for up to 40 trainees by the end of 2006-07. The local government program allocation for housing construction is \$20.5m in 2005-06 and \$31.6m in 2006-07. The expected mix of delivery models in 2006-07 is ICHOs' existing programs \$11.7m, training programs approximately \$7.9m, and DPI Construction Division \$11.69m.

As you can see, there has been a shift and there will be a continuing shift away from the ICHOs for whatever reason - probably mainly capacity issues. In some instances, they have been unable to deliver housing programs. Therefore, government has decided that the Construction Division will take more and more of this work and ensure that the expenditure targets are reached. I am not sure whether Mr Tobin has anything to add to that?

Mr TOBIN: Thank you, minister. Dr Lim, going back to your earlier question, I think you were asking how the housing construction program would be delivered with that output appropriation. To clarify that, the bundle of funds for indigenous housing, repairs and maintenance, construction, and management is under the NT Indigenous Housing Program, with the program manager being in Local Government, Housing and Sport, but the delivery of the housing construction element of it is delivered by this small group of people there. There are four technical officers, a training director and another director who, unfortunately, cannot be here with us tonight as his son is having an operation interstate. That is the explanation between the

output appropriation here for construction. The bulk of the dollars are in Local Government, Housing and Sport.

Dr LIM: The minister then said that this indigenous housing construction group will replace the ICHOs, but I hear that they are only a 14 staff on that group. How are you going to manage the total IHANT program across the Territory with only 14 personnel, especially in light of the Chief Minister's 20-year-plan and her call for \$1bn of housing from the federal government? How are you going to manage that?

Dr BURNS: I mentioned the Construction Division which is a GBD, which is separate to the Indigenous Essential Services group. Possibly, Mr Tobin might want to talk about the interrelationship between your section and the Construction Division in expanding the role of the Construction Division in indigenous housing on remote communities?

Mr TOBIN: The program, as it exists, is being delivered by this group through grants to community housing organisations. Where community housing organisations have agreed to deliver construction, they are engaging a project manager in any case themselves. The project management does not fall directly to this small group of people. They are there to facilitate the program and also to audit compliance. With more of the program being directed through the Construction Division as project managers, it will actually free up some capacity of these people to become more involved in construction training.

The project management is actually not done by this small group of people in the level of detail that you are talking about actually managing individual construction projects. That is the explanation for ...

Dr LIM: Minister, what I hear is that this group will not be the project managers; the community councils will still be the recipient of funding from IHANT to commission the construction of the homes. Are you not adding another layer of bureaucracy? You are replacing all the ICHOs, and the ICHOs will now be defunct, and the funding that is provided by IHANT to a community government council will now be managed by your group?

Dr BURNS: Do you want to answer that, Mr Tobin?

Mr TOBIN: Thanks, minister. The ICHOs will continue on to have their roles, as you are aware, in asset management, rental collections, repairs and maintenance - those sort of functions. It is not currently the case that every ICHO every year has a construction project. In many cases, it becomes an additional job for them to take on and engage a project manager and then contract with the ability to deliver. In fact, it is trying to free up some of their capacity to concentrate on their core functions of the asset and attendant management by saying that the Northern Territory government will contract directly with project managers if need be, and with builders, to deliver these programs.

Over the last few years, there has been more of a move towards what we have called the regional project approach, in any case, where the Northern Territory government has directly contracted with project managers to deliver, say, eight or nine houses in a range of communities, rather than providing the grants to the community housing organisation. The project manager has been contracted to the Northern Territory government, and so have the builders. In that case, it is freeing up a significant amount of resource for community housing organisations to concentrate on core business.

Dr BURNS: The regional approach, Dr Lim, also allows the provision of training, because there is continuity of work. In Central Australia, there has been some good examples of training programs, and they are being expanded throughout the Territory. I am not sure whether Mr Tobin wants to comment on this also?

Mr TOBIN: Yes, there has been a training program that commenced initially in Central Australia with five communities and, eventually, expanded to six. The model with those was that a builder/trainer was put in place with four trainees, in each case building two houses per year, with the objective of taking these people through to a Certificate III in a General Construction qualification.

We have recently reviewed that with the communities involved and other ICHOs. As I said in earlier comments, we are refocusing that back to a Certificate II qualification in General Construction, combined with a Certificate II qualification in Housing Repairs and Maintenance function. We are intending to increase the geographic spread of that. The intention of that model is that the people who qualify at the end of it, those with a Certificate II, would be moved into a paid employment position with their ICHO or whoever is servicing the housing in those communities.

Dr LIM: Finally, just for the record, in fact your program started before the change of government and I am glad to see that it has continued in a much enhanced fashion. I congratulate the government for picking up and running and making it a much better program to ensure that local Aboriginal people are trained in the construction industry. No further comments, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to respond to that, minister?

Dr BURNS: No, I suppose, even when the missions were there, training went on in housing construction. It is a shame, over the years - I have known people out in particularly coastal communities, well trained during the mission days and there just seems to be a long gap in there. This government is focused on training outcomes in construction for Aboriginal people throughout the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Is your Chief Minister committed to that?

Dr BURNS: Of course, as a government we are committed to that, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, being consistent with the other two questions, but I might rephrase it slightly. The Minister for Housing has been to Canberra to talk to the minister for Aboriginal Affairs about housing. The minister for Aboriginal Affairs has just made a statement in parliament talking about five or six possible options to increase the amount of Aboriginal housing. It was reported in the paper the other day that the minister was looking at private construction of housing for indigenous people in the Territory. Minister, why is this indigenous housing group not in the department of Housing?

Dr BURNS: Because it is a policy issue that I mentioned before, member for Nelson. I suppose in my portfolio areas we are looking at the provision of infrastructure and delivery of infrastructure programs. I am very focused on that. I will leave the policy issues to the member for Barkly, the Minister for Housing. No doubt, you will have an opportunity to talk to him about the policy issues. I am focused on infrastructure, and I have been since I have taken over this portfolio area. I believe we have generally achieved in the delivery of infrastructure programs throughout the Territory. The department is geared up for it, so it is a positive step in having it in this particular area. We will just have to agree to disagree on this one, but I am quite comfortable with it and I am very focused on it. I certainly appreciate the experience of those in this particular area within the department. Do you have another comment, Mr Tobin?

Mr TOBIN: Thank you, minister, just briefly. There is another synergy that we are trying to develop through having the housing construction program with the major infrastructure department. Wherever we are building houses in indigenous communities, we try to engage local capacities as much and wherever we can, and that sets a model for us in a wider government infrastructure program. We have people who are experienced in identifying the capacity and the ability to work in the wider infrastructure program, so the intention is part of this identification of capacity and the knowledge in this group allows us to assist identifying opportunities for greater indigenous participation in the wider construction program.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I directed the question to you because it was a policy question and you are the only one who can really answer a policy question. I should mention that under the heading Business Line for Public Housing, under Territory Housing, it just says: 'provision of public housing to ensure Territorians have access to safe, secure and affordable housing'. I would have thought that encompasses everything the indigenous housing people are doing. I am in no way saying they are not doing a good job. I am just looking at it from a distant point of view, asking why we are basically duplicating things? We are trying to cut costs down, of course. Perhaps you could say there is no increase in costs, but it is strange that you have a department specifically for housing, and there is another group in another department doing something that the minister has been talking about in the media, and in parliament and in Canberra.

Dr BURNS: There may well be a day when all these things are handled by one department. However, given the deficits in housing on remote communities and the stark need there, it is incumbent on government, both federal and Territory, to really focus on that and dedicate effort and resources into that area. That is certainly what we are doing.

Mr WOOD: You are right, but I see an Aboriginal minister in charge of housing being the ideal person to run this whole thing. I would have thought it was good PR for one thing, and that minister would have the ability to do that.

Dr BURNS: We are not interested in PR, member for Nelson; we are interested in functionality.

Mr MILLS: Oh, so you say!

Mr WOOD: Well, that is not what we got yesterday.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order, member for Nelson!

Dr BURNS: A fairly salient point has just been pointed out to me that, although government employee housing falls within the Department of Housing, the construction of that housing in remote areas is carried out by DPI. I suppose there are other precedents, but we will just have to agree to disagree.

Mr WOOD: I ask a more pertinent question, which is about Aboriginal employment in housing construction field. I raised this issue the other night in parliament in relation to a house that was being built in Central Australia through the Centre for Appropriate Technology. There was an article written in the magazine by that group which mentioned the length of time it took to build a house using Aboriginal employment versus getting a private contractor in and just whacking up a house.

When we are looking at trying to erect a large number of houses for the best value for our dollar, where does the government see its main role - getting housing up quickly because we are so short on housing, or to use housing as a means of employment?

Dr BURNS: That is a very good question. I suppose it is a balance because, on one side there is an imperative to get more housing stock out there, but also there is an equally important issue about building capacity - particularly training capacity and skills - on Aboriginal communities. There has to be a trade-off there. The regional approach to housing is an issue where there have been problems. In some cases, it has taken time to construct those houses. However, we also need a modicum of patience there. At the end of the day, we do have an estimates process where members of parliament look at the efficiencies of government. We cannot be completely inefficient but, at the same time, we need to just be a bit flexible in what we do.

The other matter is of the types of housing that we construct. I know you mentioned the Minister for Housing inspecting different types of houses. There is probably room there for modular or kit construction. There is a big need out there in both the need for housing stock and the need for employment in Aboriginal communities. As a government, we are dedicated to trying to build both.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – LAND PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Output 2.1 - Land Information Infrastructure

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Land Planning, Development and Management, Output 2.1, Land Information Infrastructure. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: No, not on that output area, thanks.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of output 2.1.

Output 2.2 - Land Use Planning and Regulation

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Land Use Planning and Regulation. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, Mr Deputy Chairman. Good evening, minister and guests at the long table. Minister, I refer you to page 157 of Budget Paper No 3. In the table under the heading Land Use Planning Regulation there is reference to applications. It also has a footnote which says: 'Applications include development and subdivision applications and planning scheme amendments'. My question is: does that include new commercial and residential building applications?

Dr BURNS: I believe so, but I will defer to Mr Applegate in that regard.

Mr APPLGATE: Rod Applegate, Executive Director, Lands and Planning through you, Mr Deputy Chairman. That application regarding development subdivision refers to any development applications that come before the Development Consent Authority of which there was ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, through Mr Deputy Chairman, the answer to that question is yes?

Mr APPLGATE: In relation to things that have to go through the Development Consent Authority. Obviously, on residential land where there is a permitted use of building a single dwelling, there is no need to go to the DCA to do that. It is not all building that goes on in the Territory, but building and development applications go before the DCA.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many new commercial and residential building applications has the department received in the last year?

Dr BURNS: It is the same table as I am looking at, Mr Deputy Chairman. I am more than happy to table this ...

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Dr BURNS: ... table which gives a list of all the applications

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr Secretary.

Dr BURNS: Mr Secretary.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr Secretary, could you please take the tabled document.

Ms CARNEY: While we are waiting for that document, approximately how many applications were there?

Dr BURNS: According to this table, in total there were 1067. That is on the table which is coming your way.

Ms CARNEY: You have referred to that table there. Is that table there the same as the table there?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Dr BURNS: I think I did say that.

Ms CARNEY: One was floating around and you seemed to be looking at another one, minister.

Dr BURNS: I gave you my personal copy, Leader of the Opposition.

Members interjecting.

A member: A point of order!

Ms CARNEY: Could you stop ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Order! I remind members to direct their questions through the Chair.

Dr LIM: Tell the minister that too, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I certainly have.

Dr BURNS: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, does the table include a comparison with the previous year?

Dr BURNS: I think we do have comparisons with previous years which I ... No, we better keep your copies, Mr Applegate.

Dr LIM: What are you going to do with the other one?

Dr BURNS: No, this is July 2004 to June 2005. I will table this again. It was 809 in the table there. I am happy for the Leader of the Opposition to have that table.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, I will look at that table shortly. A separate question, unrelated: the suburb of Brinkin is being rezoned and is going to be incorporated in to the suburb of Tiwi - correct?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question, minister?

Dr BURNS: I believe what you are talking about, Leader of the Opposition, is the work of the Place Names Committee. I do not believe there is any ...

Ms CARNEY: So it is not a rezoning?

Dr BURNS: There is no rezoning, not of any residential properties. There might be some inclusion of land that is on the beach, but I am not sure. I will defer to others on that. However, there will be no residential properties rezoned. Would someone – would you identify yourself please?

Mr STEPHENS: Vic Stephens, Senior Director, Land Information. The changes in the boundary of Brinkin as a suburb, and some others in the Darwin municipality, is simply to extend the boundaries of the suburbs to the extent of the Territory's control over the sea. It is simply an extension out to the sea boundaries of the municipality.

Ms CARNEY: So, the residents of Brinkin and, in particular, the one who came to see me the other day concerned about a diminished property value as a result, need not worry?

Dr BURNS: I am assuming you have directed the question through to me, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: My eyes are everywhere, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All questions go to the minister.

Dr BURNS: All right. Yes, we can give that assurance. If you want to ask that constituent or person to come and see me, I am at Rapid Creek markets most Sundays between 7.30 and noon.

Ms CARNEY: I think she walked past you when you were at the market, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister, for your free advertisement. Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you Mr Deputy Chairman. I want to ask some questions now in relation to the Little Mindil Beach development. Firstly, can you ...

Dr BURNS: Before you do, is this under this output area? I do not believe so but ...

Ms CARNEY: I tell you why I think it is.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, hang on. Let the minister check that first.

Dr BURNS: That would be under the land development area, wouldn't it?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just bear with us, Leader of the Opposition.

Dr BURNS: I would like to move through these output areas in order ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is all right. We will come to it later.

Dr BURNS: ... Leader of the Opposition. I am not trying to curtail your questioning at all. I am more than happy to answer questions about Little Mindil, but I believe it is down in the land development which is two down from here.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Leader of the Opposition, can you keep your questions to Land Use Planning? You will get the chance to ask any particular questions.

Ms CARNEY: Given that no one has heard the question, Mr Deputy Chairman, perhaps you could do me the courtesy, as can the minister, of hearing it before he and you decide where it can go.

Minister, I am asking this question in this output area because, on page 157 of the Budget Paper No 3 under the heading Land Use Planning and Regulation it says: ‘

Land use policies, management of the planning and development framework for the Northern Territory Planning Scheme, and provision of administrative support to the Development Consent Authority.

It is against or in light of that statement that I would like to ask the following questions. No doubt, you will tell me that I cannot, as can your colleague, the Deputy Chairman, but please hear it.

Minister, can you tell me why the piece of land defined on this 2004 document published by government seeking opinions on the development at Myilly Point which identified the land - and I have a picture of it here, so it is this document you would be familiar with - is different from the one on your government website today? I am happy to hand these over to you. You will note - and I will short circuit it for you - that the boundary changes in two respects: (1) it goes unlike the initial one for which the public views were sought and, (2) the most recent one extends over the tree line and apparently into the creek and also extends to take in some of the beach.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, can we please look at those maps?

Dr BURNS: I will accept the question, Mr Deputy Chairman, in the interest ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you need a moment to have a look at the maps?

Dr BURNS: Yes. I have Neville Jones beside me who is in charge of this particular area. Did you want to comment on the maps that the Leader of the Opposition is talking about? They appear to be from different angles to me, looking at them as a layman. Maybe you would like to comment, Mr Jones? Please identify yourself for the purposes of *Hansard*.

Mr JONES: Neville Jones, Executive Director of Land Development. Leader of the Opposition, I think the first diagram you are showing is from a pamphlet that was produced a couple of years ago. I do not believe there is any material difference in those pictures; you are looking at them from different angles. The two I have here are outlined according to the cadastral boundary. That diagram there is something that was an oblique photograph that was produced for a pamphlet.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, are you saying that the yellow line on this document does not extend to the beach?

Dr BURNS: I will take advice on this, Leader of the Opposition. Mr Jones.

Mr JONES: You are looking at a slightly different diagram that I do not have in front of me, but the yellow line does extend to the beach because the cadastral boundary does extend to the foreshore.

Ms CARNEY: Whereas, however, the one on the government brochure in 2004 really does not go to the edge of the beach?

Dr BURNS: I have gleaned the issue that you are trying to get to, Leader of the Opposition. We are going to the issue of public access to the beach, which was an undertaking given by government, which still ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman! I would be grateful if the minister would simply answer my questions. He may or may not know where I am going but I would be grateful if he would answer my question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order.

Ms CARNEY: There is no point of order?

Dr BURNS: With respect, Mr Deputy Chairman, this is not a court of law. I am answering ...

Ms CARNEY: No, it is the Estimates Committee and there is a little rule book over there.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The minister has answered the question.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I know. He has not answered it but, anyway ...

Dr BURNS: I reiterate that access to the beach is an iron-clad guarantee by government.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you would be aware of where the high water mark is. On the basis of the diagram shown for this development on your government's website - split though your government might be - would you not, as a Territorian, be very concerned that the high water mark - based on this document, not the earlier one - might cause significant problems for the development?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question?

Dr BURNS: Of course I do, Mr Deputy Chairman. I am not concerned in that regard. I reiterate that there is an iron-clad guarantee that the public will have access to the beaches. This issue was actually raised with me at Rapid Creek markets last Sunday by a resident. I am there most Sundays between 7.30 am and noon. Basically, I undertook to reply formally to the resident in the nearby block of towers on that particular issue that you are raising, and also a number of other issues that the resident raised. An officer from my office, Mr Wolf Loenneker, has also contacted that particular person and explained to them. I will be responding to them formally on this, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister for Planning. I have some photos here - you may have seen them or something like them; I am happy to hand them to you – that show what our high tide looks like in that area although, I am sure, your advisors have shown you photos similar to this.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I ask the minister be shown those photos and given a moment just to digest that.

Ms CARNEY: Sounds like a court. Thank you, Mr Secretary. My question, minister, is this: what requirements will there be on developers to address the threat of king tides and cyclone-elevated king tides?

Dr BURNS: I can answer that, member for Araluen. Through the consent process, these very issues that you raise must be addressed by any proponent, particularly those who are proposing building in these areas. Your photo also shows the creek that runs beside this block of land. It is not really a creek – well, it is a creek, but it has been made by human hands. I did not say 'man-made'. Basically, that creek has to be remediated. These treatments, I suppose, and these issues will be addressed now that there has been a short-listed group drawn up. They will have to come back in detail with their proposals. I ask Mr Jones to comment further on this issue.

Mr JONES: The fact that this site is subject to inundation and is at risk from storm surge is well known. That was well outlined in the invitation documents. All the respective developers whose expressions of interest were accepted, in one way or another addressed that. Those that are now on the short list, of course, will be required to address that further. The published invitation document indicated that some form of treatment would be necessary; whether that was a revetment or a sand dune-type system. For that very reason, that will be one of the issues that would most likely trigger off the need for environmental assessment.

Dr BURNS: Bearing in mind that, to a large extent, the adjoining property owned by the casino is subject, more or less, to the same sorts of conditions.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, what actions will be taken, if any, to ensure that there is no sewage outflow into the creek? You will appreciate that that is a reasonably topical issue.

Dr BURNS: Yes, that is a very good question in terms of headworks, integration with the road network, and with the provision of essential services. These are all issues that must be addressed now by the detailed submissions of the three short-listed proponents. I hand over to Mr Jones to address that issue in a bit more detail.

Mr JONES: The minister is correct in that these issues are ones for the detailed evaluation stage. I also point out that, notwithstanding whatever development proposal ... is ultimately chosen, they are still

required to go through the development assessment process. Those development proposals would, of course, be exposed to the public and to all of the service authorities.

I can assure you that there would be no way that any sewage would be allowed to be discharged into that creek. Indeed, what would be likely to happen is that the existing pump station will be required to be upgraded by the ultimate developer.

Dr BURNS: Possibly, you could also elaborate, Mr Jones, about the responsibilities of these proponents now in providing works to further develop the site. Government has made it very clear that we will not be financially contributing in any significant way for the development, apart from the land. Did you want to comment further on that?

Ms CARNEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman! The minister has satisfactorily answered my question.

Dr BURNS: All right. Well, I will not require Mr Jones to answer that question.

Ms CARNEY: I do, however, have a final question on this area. Will the so-called independent EPA be undertaking any environmental analysis of the proposed development? If so, what form will it take?

Dr BURNS: The exact nature of that is to be determined, but as Mr Jones has already foreshadowed, that there will be a full and open process, which includes a consent process and an environmental assessment process. What form that might take, I believe depends on the nature of the development. Possibly, Mr Jones might like to comment further?

Mr JONES: Mr Deputy Chairman, in the invitation document it is very clearly stated that prospective developers would be required to prepare a notice of intent to be lodged with the Environmental Protection Authority in order that the minister for the Environment and Heritage would determine what level of assessment would be required.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions in respect of Land Use Planning and Regulations, output 2.2?

Mr WOOD: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I thought you might.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, I suppose one of the main areas that you are looking at, at the moment, is the introduction of the Northern Territory Planning Scheme. Just a general question: since that document came into being, which was about six years ago under the previous government, I only know of one public meeting, and that was an information meeting held some months ago. The government has now, by letter, sent out to various people that the public meeting will be through the Development Consent Authority. In fact, on Monday at Palmerston, they were having a Development Consent Authority meeting and the NT Planning Scheme was coming up for discussion. On Friday morning, the Litchfield DCA will be discussing the same document. Minister, why are we not having public meetings regarding the NT Planning Scheme in the evening or late afternoon, instead of the middle of the day when people who might wish to attend would find it very difficult?

Dr BURNS: Thank you for the question, member for Nelson. The list of meetings that I have are Palmerston, Tuesday 20 June; Alice Springs, Thursday 22 June; Litchfield, Friday 23 June; Darwin, Thursday 6 July; and Katherine, Friday 7 July and Cox Peninsula to be announced. The timing of those meetings is probably an operational issue and I defer to Mr Applegate on that issue.

Mr APPLGATE: Thank you, minister. It is my recollection, as you pointed out, member for Nelson, that this has been in gestation for nearly six years. There has been a range of public consultation on previous drafts of the scheme but, more recently, with the latest scheme that has been on exhibition, I think we have held in over excess of 26 ...

A witness: Thirty-seven.

Mr APPLGATE: Thirty-seven public meetings held throughout the Northern Territory. In the meetings that I attended, there was plenty of scope for not only information exchange from the public servants who were presenting them but, also, to answer questions from members of the public and clarify any concerns

that people had. In relation to the hearings, they have been exercised as part of the statutory responsibilities, in that people who have made submissions on the scheme are given the opportunity to come before the DCA and clarify again anything they had made in their public submissions, and seek, I guess, clarification on any issues. I am not sure ...

Dr BURNS: The member for Nelson is actually asking whether, because the meeting at Palmerston was scheduled during the day time, it might be possible to have evening meetings so that more members of the public might attend. Do you think we can give consideration to that, Mr Applegate? Please identify yourself.

Mr WOOD: That doesn't look like Mr Applegate.

Mr O'NEILL: Jim O'Neill, Senior Director, Planning and Development Assistance Services. The hearings to which you are referring are a requirement under the *Planning Act*. The Development Consent Authority is the reporting body as defined in the *Planning Act*, and it is holding hearings on this particular amendment to the planning scheme in the same fashion as any other amendment to the planning scheme. It is part of normal business. Invitations have already been sent out to all of those people who have made submissions to the planning scheme amendment.

Dr BURNS: I take your point, member for Nelson, and I note in the notes that I have here that it will be determined whether further consultation is required and the nature of that. You have made a very good point and I am certainly willing to take that on board. It is my desire to engage as many people within the public as possible in this process, and you have made a good point.

Mr WOOD: Thanks, minister, for that. Yes, I am not saying this is going to attract thousands of people but, because it has taken so long and it is now more or less in its final form, it is important that people at least have that opportunity. If they do not take that opportunity, fair enough, then they can only blame themselves.

On some issues related to that document, minister. As you know, I chaired a meeting of PLAN on the weekend and a number of your government spies - sorry minders, representatives - were there ...

Dr BURNS: We have no spies.

Mr WOOD: I did not announce them by name but I told people they were just down the back, Clare.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, stick to the question.

Mr WOOD: Sorry, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Dr BURNS: It was a public meeting wasn't it, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes, but they came as they are here today - together.

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: A bit of order, please, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I take that back; it was not the man in the red tie.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson!

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman. One of the concerns, minister, was when the DCA is having to take matters into account, it must take in any planning schemes that apply to the land to which the application relates. I think the planning people believe that the LUO for Darwin and for other areas, with probably the exception of Litchfield Shire and maybe Lake Bennett, have all disappeared. Could you tell us what land use objectives still exist and will be applicable under the NT Planning Scheme, and what land use objectives have been removed and will not be applicable under the NT Planning Scheme?

Dr BURNS: I know of the Litchfield plan that you alluded to and the waterfront is another one. However, it is erroneous - completely erroneous - for anyone to suggest that all these documents are disappearing,. What is happening is they are being incorporated into the planning scheme as reference documents and principles. In other cases, some of these land use objectives have actually been achieved.

Therefore, it is not as if by a stroke of a pen all these things are evaporating or disappearing. What we are attempting to do through this revision of the planning scheme - and it has been going on for some time -- is to consolidate what is a very complex and, sometimes, mystifying system and scheme.

I can honestly say - and I am not ashamed to admit this - that when I became minister it took me quite a few briefings to get the very basics of the planning scheme. It is full of contradictory nomenclature between Darwin and Alice Springs and quite idiosyncratic rules which affect various parts of the scheme. Whilst we are not in the business in stripping legitimate differences that exist, say between Darwin and Alice Springs, we want to preserve those and there is going to be no major changes there.

What we want to do is to try and consolidate where possible and make the whole thing simpler. That is the overall view. Regarding what land use objectives are still in existence and their status within the new planning scheme, I will leave that to the experts who are sitting beside me. Please identify yourselves if you can address the question. Mr O'Neill by the sound of it, with the red tie.

Mr O'NEILL: As you rightly point out, Mr Wood, this project has been going for six years now. It is a consolidation of a series of documents that have grown up, essentially since self-government. Amongst those is a range of policy documents that, at the very least, date back to the mid-1980s. In those policy documents we have in excess of 400 separate statements of policy relating to the use of development of land. In the 1999 version of the *Planning Act*, that was the definition of the land use policy: a statement of planning policy relating to the use and development of land.

It is untrue to say we have disregarded, deleted or, in other ways, ignored those statements of policy. In putting together the new planning scheme, we took a great deal of time, effort and energy in analysing each and every one of those 400 statements. We took the view, in the way we have structured the new scheme, that it was not possible or necessarily the smart thing to do, just to replicate all 400 separate statements because many of them are no longer relevant. As the minister has pointed out, some of those objectives have been achieved. Some of them cannot be achieved because of subsequent changes to government policy which were not reflected through a subsequent amendment to the act or to the planning scheme.

What we did do was to still recall elements from those land use objectives and decided even if you can retain 400 separate statements of policy there is no front end to the scheme unless you develop some overarching statements. That is why we have included the Northern Territory Planning Principles - 10 fairly basic principles. They pick up, in one way or another, very many of those 400 separate statements.

We have also included planning principles specific to particular regions, and they too pick up some of the statements of policy known as land use objectives. We also have statements for the capacity for planning principles relating to area plans. There is an example in existence already for the waterfront development. So, we have, in fact, three particular levels where we can articulate policy relating to the use and development of land. In addition to those, we also have zone purpose statements which establish the policy intent for each zone. We have clause purpose statements which can establish the policy intent of the individual clauses.

I really must say that it is not true we just disregarded, discarded, or otherwise ignored the current land use objectives.

On top of that, we have introduced a clause, I think 2.7, wherein we can reference policy documents that remain relevant. The three we have referenced under that clause, at the moment, are the Litchfield Planning Concepts And Land Use Objectives of 2002, the Coomalie Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives, and the Finnis Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives - I think also of 2002. As those documents age and become less relevant, then it may be necessary that we take them out of the referenced documents, or they might be updated, or we can add to the referenced documents. The scheme is now designed in such a way that it is inherently flexible and can take on board new policy as it is developed.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, land use objectives gives people an understanding of how their particular area is going to be developed regardless of zoning, because zoning through this NT Planning Scheme will roughly be the same with variations.

Litchfield has this planning concept which tells people in Litchfield, basically, how Litchfield will be developed. What have the people of Darwin or Alice Springs got beside a very general outline under Northern Territory Planning Scheme? What do they have that they can say: 'Now we know with certainty

that this is the way our city will be developed'? If you have such general land use objectives, aren't people going to say it is so general the government will be able to interpret that in a way in wishes?

Dr BURNS: I disagree with that, member for Nelson. It is my understanding that you are talking about Darwin, for instance; that the town plan will be incorporated into the planning scheme?

Mr WOOD: Well ...

Dr BURNS: I believe the town plan is quite specific in ordering what sort of development or prohibited uses. It is also my understanding that similar schema that you have shown there for Litchfield will exist for the centres of Alice Springs and Darwin. Maybe Mr O'Neill would like to elaborate further?

Mr O'NEILL: As I indicated in going through those various now-ageing policy documents, we took a different approach in the way we integrated policy statements and policy generally to the new scheme. Many of those documents - in fact, most of them - no longer have currency, or they a great deal of internal inconsistency - again, because of changing circumstance and change in policy of government over a succession of years.

We took the view that, unless every element adds value to the planning scheme, it should not be there. If we have aged documentation for Alice Springs, for example, that does not add value to the planning scheme, why keep it, why retain it? You are quite right; it might be sensible thing for there to be an articulation of policy, more detail in relation to a particular centre, than exists in the planning scheme that has been on exhibition. However, that would not conform to our brief. Our brief was take what exists, rationalise, integrate and consolidate and create a new scheme - do not create new material. We have tried very hard to hold faith to that. If we were to, say, develop new policy relating to the Alice Springs, then that would constitute a significant change. It is not part of our brief.

We have said yes, we have developed a planning scheme that, as I said earlier, can integrate new policy as it is developed. This is not the end of a process; this is the creation of a framework to take Territory planning through the next few years.

Dr BURNS: It is also my understanding - and I will stand corrected on this - talking about the Alice Springs historical precinct which is a very important historical, social, cultural and tourist icon that, even down to that level of detail, that can be accommodated within the new planning scheme. The scheme can become very particular and that is the strength of it. I do not know whether you want to comment further, Mr O'Neill?

Mr O'NEILL: I think you have said it adequately.

Mr WOOD: We have plenty of other things to cross over, but it is extremely important because a lot of people will be concerned about whether the land use objectives that used to be - I do not know whether Palmerston had land use objectives, but certainly Alice Springs had land use objectives. However, they gave guidance to people about their own particular area. This document is so broad that it might encompass, in theory, all things, but it loses ownership of the local people.

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, it is my understanding - second-hand, of course - that people have been talking about a Parap land use objective. To my knowledge, there is not a Parap land use objective. Some people are under the misapprehension that land use objectives exist over their particular suburb when they do not.

Mr WOOD: I will not drag it on go too much further. One other area where there were land use objectives, I believe, is central Darwin of some sort, and they have been replaced by the Capital City Charter.

Dr BURNS: That is correct.

Mr WOOD: Minister, how much public input has gone into that particular document?

Dr BURNS: As you are aware, Capital City Charter is a cooperative venture between the Northern Territory government and the council. In the public's input for that, Mr O'Neill serves on that particular committee and has done for some time. Possibly, he could talk about that.

Mr O'NEILL: Thank you, minister. As the minister indicated, this was a document which was developed in association with the council as the Darwin, if you like, response to another local example of the Palmerston Partnership Agreement.

There are a number of capital cities around the country that have a formal agreement with the state government. Adelaide took the path of a statutory – it is actually embedded in the statute. They have their own act for an arrangement between the council and the state. Victoria has an agreement and Queensland does as well.

We took the view, in discussions at officer level, whether a charter would be a suitable model to adopt, which is, essentially, the same model as exists in Queensland. We drafted up a document which we presented to the Capital City Committee, and the committee said: 'Yes, that looks good, please go forth and consult'.

We mailed that out to a total of 211 stakeholder groups and individuals around the Territory but, particularly, here in Darwin. I understand from the meeting that you chaired - and second-hand from my colleague - that at least one organisation claimed that they had never heard of it. Interestingly, that organisation was the Planning Action Network, and we actually have a letter on file responding to it. I contest the argument that it did not receive adequate airplay in community consultation from us.

Mr WOOD: That may be a reasonable answer; I am not disputing that. However, it obviously has not gone to the public like a set of LUOs would have.

Dr BURNS: I will certainly send back those comments through the Capital City Committee, member for Nelson. I cannot speak for the committee because it is a joint venture between the government and the council. However, if that is the feedback you are getting, I will certainly feed that back to the committee and see what action they might take.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I have only just seen the document and what I have read is quite good. However, it should be made known that Darwin is the capital city for all of us, and not just the people who live in Darwin. A lot of people work in Darwin who live in other places but, like a lot of people, they like their capital city. A lot more people would probably take an interest if there was more consultation about how their city should be.

Dr BURNS: I will take that on board as well, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I will keep moving right along. Minister, another area is planning appeals. As you would know, there was an application for some kennels – and I know the Deputy Chairman would be interested in hearing this - on land zoned RL1 next to a little pocket of land which was, obviously, much smaller than the normal RL1. The kennels were approved by the planning authority. Of course, lo and behold, when people thought they could appeal against it, they were told no because RL1, regardless of what size blocks are there, is not regarded as residential as required under the Appeal Section of the *Planning Act*.

Minister, will you regard people who live on rural land in Litchfield as residential for the sake of the act? Would you also recognise that living on a rural block does not exempt one's from noise or inappropriate development?

Dr BURNS: Thank you, member for Nelson. By way of background, in opposition before we became government, undertakings were given that, in government, we would introduce limited third party appeals. There were no third party appeals in planning matters previously. We have done exactly that. You and I enjoyed the debate, I think it was last year, and put forward your point of view very clearly. I indicated at that time that, basically, we were implementing what we had undertaken to do.

The next piece of work is the planning scheme, which we have been discussing here tonight and, then, at an appropriate time, government would review the *Planning Act* and would consider the whole issue of third party appeals and some of the issues that you are talking about here this evening. I gave that undertaking then, and I reiterate that undertaking now.

In this specific instance, the residents of the area came to see me at the Rapid Creek markets a number of times, including last Sunday. I understand their point of view. However, the message I got last Sunday was that, although basically that development had gone ahead, the consent authority had imposed quite a number of conditions on that development. The residents that I spoke to recognised the extent of those

conditions. They did ask questions such as: 'Well, how are they going to be enforced?' That was the tone of the conversation that we had last week.

By way of further background, that particular area has been zoned rural living for some time, and the operation of a kennel and cattery is a permitted use, and has been for a long time in that particular area. It is not as if the person who has had this development has done anything out of the box. They made application, as their right is, to get permission from the consent authority to do it. The consent authority recognised the amenity of the area and tried to accommodate the wishes of the residents.

To finish off, I take your point; it is a very good point. I have said that, in future, government will consider the whole issue of third party appeals as part of a review of the *Planning Act*. I am not sure if Mr Applegate or Mr O'Neill have anything to add to what I have said.

Mr APPLGATE: I could not have given a better answer myself.

Dr BURNS: I am learning!

Mr WOOD: I probably should correct the statement you made that the kennels were not permitted. They were a consent use application. You said they were ...

Dr BURNS: Sorry, yes. There is a bit more I have to learn so, thank you, Gerry. Permitted use by consent is what I meant, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I know that you are offering to change or at least look at third party appeals.

Dr BURNS: I said I would consider it.

Mr WOOD: That is very good. You said the government promised that they would be limited. What I am arguing here is: are you actually limiting by discriminating against people living on certain zoned blocks, rather than limiting the application of the appeal? That is where I ask you to at least consider changing that, as it is already limited, because you cannot appeal on a building two storeys and below. There are certain things you are already limited on.

Dr BURNS: It is my understanding that RR blocks do have right of appeal. I am not sure whether the residents of the De Caen Close were given the opportunity to go down the path of rezoning to RR. Are you aware of that?

Mr APPLGATE: I am aware of that.

Dr BURNS: Did you want to speak to it?

Mr APPLGATE: Yes, they do have the opportunity, and none of them elected to opt for rezoning, given the size of their blocks.

Mr WOOD: I can see the Deputy Chairman was listening very intently there because the word that we got back was only one person had received the letter and, secondly, the complaints were not only from people in the small blocks. If you just allow the RR people, if that is what you were going to zone that land to, it would leave out other people who have just as much up in arms about the channels in the first place. I do not believe that is the right approach at the moment. Zoning can come at another time. The issue is whether people should have had a right to appeal regardless of block size.

Dr BURNS: The member for Nelson has summed up there. I am not going to carry the conversation any further.

Mr WOOD: That is it.

Dr LIM: Minister, when you tabled the two documents earlier this evening on planning applications you proudly said that this year's applications had increased. Yes, they have increased by some 250 or so. You should note that the increase has only been in Darwin and Palmerston. The rest - Litchfield, Alice Springs, Katherine - has suffered significant decrease in applications. Can you explain what is happening with land development in these areas?

Dr BURNS: Let me look here. In answer to your question, it comes back to building activity in those areas. Everyone is aware that there has been substantial building activity in Darwin. Regarding other regions, I get the median prices from the Real Estate Institute of the Northern Territory, and it is my understanding that real estate values have been climbing in both Alice Springs and Katherine. Some of the feedback I am getting is that there has been sale of properties in Katherine for development. I take your point; that is why, as a government, we are keen to foster regional development.

Dr LIM: Minister, isn't it the point that it is because of the lack of development that present building structures, houses and everything is going up in price, because of the lack of land and lack of construction industry in those areas? What are you doing about it, as the minister?

Dr BURNS: I point to some figures – 149 compared to 157 - I think we need more data. As you would be aware, whether there is a significant difference, we would need a three-year rolling average to really determine statistically whether there has been a significant increase or decrease. I am sure you are aware of that. I make that point.

Land release is a very important question. As you are aware, as a government, we work with Lhere Artepe, the native title holders, to release the first stage which I believe has sold very well. Of course, the second stage went out once; the reserve price was not met. It will go out again. Just to foreshadow any questions about this, there was some talk about that being overvalued. I have asked the department - apart from the Australian Valuation Office valuation - to get another external valuer or valuers to look at the value of that particular land so that when we go out to auction we are assured that the price that we are going out to as a reserve is a realistic price that is backed up by solid valuations.

I heard minister Henderson talking early today about Mt John Valley also. We are certainly putting monies towards headworks in that particular development. It has been slow, but not as slow as the previous 25 years when Alice Springs was land-locked because the previous government could not negotiate with the native title holders.

Dr LIM: When housing was quite cheap. Anyway, we will move on. No further questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman, one other question. Regarding Palmerston future development, I was told by a fairly reliable source on the weekend that there is a plan for the eastern suburbs of Palmerston ...

Dr BURNS: That is quite true.

Mr WOOD: ... and that has only been released to government members and it has not been released for public discussion yet. When I say public, I do not mean a few.

Dr BURNS: I do not know what you mean by 'released to government members'. Are you saying that we are only selling the land to government members?

Mr WOOD: No. What I was told was the members from Palmerston on the government side had seen the plans for the eastern suburbs development of Palmerston, and the opposition had not seen it. I am not sure whether that is true or not, but I am putting that to find out whether that is the case.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you want to take that question?

Dr BURNS: I will take the question. There are generalised plans. I think I foreshadowed, at least in conversation, with whoever might come up and ask me about future land release in Palmerston, that there is a generalised plan for further land release in what is called East Palmerston. However, that will all be subject to a public consultation process. It is my understanding also that, before a development lease is undertaken there, there will be public consultation and the public will be involved in the subsequent release of land. I want it to be a public process.

We should all learn the salutary lessons of the Delfin 7.6. That is an example of where things have gone wrong and I certainly do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past. However, possibly others could talk about Palmerston East. Before they do, I should put on the record that, of environmental land and land amenity, government has locked up areas of significance of Mitchell Creek. We do not want to see the potential for what is happening at The Chase to reoccur in Palmerston East. I will give others the question.

Mr O'NEILL: Thank you, minister. The plans to which you are referring were developed under the auspices of the partnership agreement with Palmerston City Council. One of the working groups under that partnership is relating to land use planning. In consultation with council, all of the service agencies and a number of other stakeholders, we have been working for the last 18 months in doing forward neighbourhood-style planning for the new suburbs of Palmerston East. We have also been doing work on a new area plan for the central business district of Palmerston.

At the moment, the work we had been doing and have now, I hope, completed is being translated into the style of the new planning scheme. It is our intention, once the parties have signed off and, with the good grace of the minister, to place those on public exhibition as an amendment to the planning scheme.

What they do, in effect - and I am confining my remarks here to Palmerston East - is establish a framework for the new suburbs. At the moment, we do not have outlined development plans. The future stages of the release of Palmerston East fills that void. As an example, as I indicated in answer to an earlier question, of how the new scheme can deliver policy as they are developed. We have done presentations to the council and, once we have that signed off, we will put it to the minister as an amendment to the planning scheme.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

I am now going to dispense with proceedings for seven minutes until 9 pm, so we can proceed to the next section which is quite a large one.

Dr BURNS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will re-convene at 9 pm.

The committee suspended.

Output 2.3 – Building Regulation

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I now reconvene this session of the Estimates Committee and I will now call for questions on Output 2.3, Building Regulation. Are there any questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Minister, has the department looked at how much extra cost will be added on to a house with the changes to the Building Regulations and *Building Act*.

Dr BURNS: You mean in terms of builders' licensing and registration and home warranty insurance?

Mr WOOD: Yes, minister. As well, there are some requirements now where a certifier is required to have a series of documentation in their hand before, for instance, they can pour the floor, which might mean there are subcontractors waiting around until all that paperwork arrives.

Dr BURNS: That is a very good question, member for Nelson. It is my understanding, after speaking directly to certifiers and their peak body, that a lot of the certifiers are already carrying out these mandatory five inspections as part of the regime. They do not believe it will add appreciably to the cost. We are talking about the tier one area of building control areas.

In relation to any extra increase to the person who is buying or building the home, I do not believe that that has been adequately quantified. Possibly, Mr Finocchiaro might answer that. However, I do not believe, in the context of the total investment for a house that someone makes, that it is a significant amount. There will be an increase. I believe that it will be less than a \$1000. I defer to Mr Finocchiaro. If you could please identify yourself and speak to the issue, through the Chair.

Mr FINOCCHIARO: Fabio Finocchiaro, Senior Director, Building Advisory Services, through the Chair. As the minister responsible, there are two issues involved with that. One is that there is a change in the

certification process, and the minister has addressed that regarding the inspection process whereby certifiers, in the main, are performing those inspections at this point in time, so we would expect there not to be a movement in that area.

The other component of the reform agenda is what is called Home Warranty Insurance. At this point in time, we are still negotiating with providers for a product that will be available on the market. The fundamental issue there is that builders today, in the domestic market, take out a Home Building Certification Policy, which honours \$300 000 houses in the order of \$1200 or thereabouts. We expect that Home Warranty Insurance will come in around that - possibly a little higher. For the added cost of that premium, consumers will be getting an additional cover that they currently do not get through the insurance, which is: they will be protected from their builder becoming insolvent, dying or disappearing. Regarding the added cost, there may be an increase in the Home Warranty Insurance component of it but, in part, that is currently paid through a home building certification fund.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is the Home Warranty Insurance company selected by government?

Dr BURNS: No, it will be an open marketplace situation, member for Nelson. Government, from the outset, has said that we will bring in the builders' licensing dimension of it. That is what we are doing now; we are processing those applications. However, we will not be implementing the Home Warranty Insurance dimension until we are sure that there is competition in the marketplace. There are at least two private providers now who have come to the Territory and met with the department. Some of those providers are associated with industry peak bodies, such as the TCA or the HIA, but there may well be others out there who are willing to come into the market. We would like to see as many as possible. We would like to see a free market economy operating here, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: That is wonderful, minister. I was wondering whether TIO were at least interested in it.

Dr BURNS: I understand, initially they were not. I am not sure what their situation is now. Possibly officers beside me have had discussions with TIO. I certainly have not.

Mr FINOCCHIARO: TIO have formally advised, I think in the last couple of months, that they would not be participating in the home warranty market. Their comment is that it is a fairly highly specialised area of the market and that they were not, at this point of time, going to participate in it.

Mr WOOD: In relation to a builder having to have \$50 000 in assets, can you give us the rationale behind that? Could you also allay concerns that I have had, that although \$50 000 might be something that a young builder might be able to afford after a few years in the business, is it possible that government will raise that amount of money, \$50 000, to a higher figure and, therefore, reduce the opportunity for young people to get into the market of being a builder?

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, there is no intention by government to alter that threshold at this time. We certainly want to encourage all suitably qualified people, particularly young people, to enter the industry. There is a lot of work to do, member for Nelson. This is a turbocharged economy.

Mr WOOD: There might be some funny looking houses going around then, minister. The other issue, of course, is the one that I have had a number of people come and see me about is the owner builders and the changes to the owner/builder regulations. From what I understand, an owner/builder can only build one house, or do work outside, that is not covered by the \$12 000 limitation and the increase in floor space. He can only do one of those projects every six years. This being the Territory, a number of people think they are losing a right they used to have. Can you explain why these changes are occurring?

Dr BURNS: Through the Chair to the member for Nelson, these changes were adopted in extensive consultation with the industry and the department, and that was the decision. We really did not want pseudo home builders getting out there and making an industry out of being a home builder. We do not really believe that we have taken any right away from anyone. We are just looking at the proper and adequate regulation of these buildings.

The other aspect of this is that, if an owner/builder sells a property, there is a liability involved. We want to ensure that if someone buys a house that has been built by an owner/builder that they are adequately covered by Home Warranty Insurance. I am sure Mr Finocchiaro, through the Chair, might also address your question.

Mr FINOCCHIARO: The home owner/builder provisions pretty much mimic what the rest of Australia provide for. In part, the reason for putting a six-year limit on it is to ensure that someone who truly wants to build their dream home can do so. However, the other side of the coin is to ensure that we are talking about genuine owner/builders; and we are not talking people who are not necessarily in the building industry, but claim the right to be an owner/builder and, therefore, then proceed to build a number of homes during the period.

The average home ownership around Australia from the last that I looked at was around the seven-year mark. If you look at that in the balance, a person who aspires to build their own home as an owner/builder has that right. I make the point that the requirements allow for future additions to that home. Therefore, it is not a matter of just being able to build your own home; it is about being able to build your home and, as money progresses, to add carports, additions and the likes.

The owner/builder provision, in part, is about ensuring that someone who aspires as an individual to build their own home can do so. It is also a provision in the other direction to ensure that we are talking about genuine owner/builders and not people who are trying to be builders who are not.

Mr WOOD: I understand that but, surely, there are cases where a person owns not only their home, but maybe some units which are homes and they own them. If they want to do work outside of the scope that is here, they would have to get certification anyway, which is part of the guarantee that the job was done correctly. Why can those people not do work on another dwelling which they own?

Dr BURNS: It sounds like these people are doing a lot of building work, member for Nelson. They should become registered builders.

Mr WOOD: They are retirees and, minister. They are probably doing some work, but they also would probably get people in to do other work as well. Why can they not continue in that vein because, if it is over \$12 000 worth of work, and outside doing major changes to the house, especially as regards floor area, they would be required to get certification. They just cannot do it themselves and leave it and sell it to someone without that person knowing that changes to that building have been approved by a certifier.

Dr BURNS: I will come back to the point I made. It sounds like these people are involved in substantial building works. I question why, if they have the skills, they do not put their name forward and become a registered builder?

Mr WOOD: The answer would be they are probably 65 years old, retired, and are enjoying it, to some extent as a hobby. It would be very difficult for some of those people to go back and do a Certificate IV or show that they had built three houses in previous times. Whilst I understand some of the reasoning, I am just not sure that, in all this regulation, we have chopped off a bit of what a lot of people in the Territory were able to do, and I think is covered simply because certification is required for major works.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your question?

Mr WOOD: I am sorry, I really actually answered the question the minister had put to me in a way: why don't they become builders?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to respond to that minister?

Dr BURNS: These are major changes we have implemented through these changes to legislation. I know when you have big changes there are always some people who feel they have missed out or are unhappy, but we are looking at the wider strategic picture. We are trying to protect consumers and ensure there are adequate standards within the building industry, and we have made a policy decision. I am sorry if some people feel their rights have been curtailed, but we have done this in close consultation with industry. I feel that if this person is all that experienced in building they should become a registered builder.

Mr WOOD: Owner/builders, of course, are not part of the industry with which this would have discussed. Therefore, owner/builders could possibly argue that the building industry would not like owner/builders to be operating, therefore, if restrictions could be placed on them that is more to the benefit of the builders.

Dr BURNS: If they are doing regular and major work, member for Nelson, it would be desirable for them to be registered. I am not sure if Mr Finocchiaro has any further comment on this issue.

Mr FINOCCHIARO: Through the Chair, the issue of owner/builders is really about leaving enough flexibility for a genuine owner/builder to do their own building project, whilst ensuring we are not allowing an opening for people who are not registered builders *per se*, but who may very well want to, or can, participate in the industry as a business outside of the regulatory framework. With respect, we are talking about an owner/builder building their own home. What we are talking about in the others is that they are investment properties.

Having said that, there is room in the regulated works for property owners to be able to carry out certain works. If you are talking specifically about maintenance, there would be no prohibition on that, so someone can re-roof the house if they so desire and, if that is an investment property, that can continue.

The issue of the licensing and the requirement for owner/builder provisions is about where we are actually increasing the floor area of that dwelling so that we get a level of workmanship and a standard of building that the community would reasonably expect. I accept the point that, regardless of whether the registered builder does that or not, it needs certification through the building certification process. However, in part, I submit that the building certification process is really a third party certification ensuring builders are, in fact, performing the work they need to perform.

Mr WOOD: I will not say finally - hopefully finally. Minister, is it not true that a person working on the house presently as an owner/builder has to take out insurance on certain works?

Dr BURNS: That is my understanding because, if they sell that house and the person who buys that house wants some comfort within the guarantee time if one of the issues turn up - the builder drops dead, goes bankrupt or whatever - they have some recourse and are not left holding the baby, so to speak.

Mr WOOD: Of course, the person who is doing their own premises, they will build as best as possible. The insurance is really put in there to protect the next owner.

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: What was the problem then, because they not only had to get insurance, they had to get certification of any work? What was the problem with owner/builders doing that kind of work?

Dr BURNS: As has been said a number of times, member for Nelson, the measures that have been brought in are to uphold the right of genuine owner/builders to build their own home but to ensure that those who are probably in the building industry, are not permitted to work around in other ways. I take your point. Possibly, owner/builders were not involved in the industry discussions, but they are a group. The industry also included certifiers and engineers and a whole range of other people other than construction companies. This was the point of view that they came to. It was not the self-interest of the industry, it was actually a broad range of views that reached consensus on this issue.

Mr WOOD: All right. Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That being the case, then that concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Land Management

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.4, Land Management. Are there any questions?

Dr BURNS: I believe, with respect Mr Deputy Chairman, that we did cover some of this area before when the Leader of the Opposition was here, regarding Little Mindil etcetera.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, minister, you have not been asked a question.

Dr BURNS: I apologise.

Mr WOOD: I will give you a couple of contemporary ones, minister. The Humpty Doo tip. Where and ...

Dr BURNS: I am surprised you have raised this issue, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It could have been something else, but I thought it was an important issue. What is the status of the Humpty Doo tip presently? What is the status of the studies into the Howard Peninsula site? Has the government given any attention to a site at Sunday Creek?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, there are three questions there.

Dr BURNS: Member for Nelson, we have dealt with this ...

Mr WOOD: Yes, but we have ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on. Let the minister answer.

Dr BURNS: ... in parliament. You have your strong views; I have my views.

Mr WOOD: I have got a rate increase.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, please!

Dr BURNS: Well, you have a rate increase, but you were also chairman of the Litchfield Shire for a number of years.

Mr WOOD: That is why I can blame the CLP for things they did five years ago.

Dr BURNS: In my portfolio areas, what I undertook to do for the Litchfield Shire Council was facilitate the transfer of title of land to them. That work is ongoing and I will let others comment on the state of play with that. I gave a personal undertaking to the council that I would facilitate that.

Regarding the possible proposal for a new cell, that lies within the minister for NRETA. Possibly, you could ask her those questions. In terms of the regional facility at the Howard Peninsula, I believe that that work has gone out to tender - the scoping work at \$250 000. I am not sure whether that tender has been announced. I defer to Mr Applegate on both of those issues.

No, we are not considering Sunday Creek for all the reasons I outlined in spades in parliament to you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: We will have to take our spades, minister.

Mr APPLGATE: As the minister has outlined, we have made an offer to Litchfield Shire Council for tender over the three transfer stations and they have accepted. We are currently in the process of transferring that land to the council. In some of the other processes that have to be done such as subdivision for the Humpty Doo Transfer Station, we have undertaken to affect that as well as the rezoning which is required. We are doing a lot of work to streamline this process and get title to the council as quickly as possible.

In relation to the regional waste management facility, as the minister outlined, the preferred site for government investigation to cater for the needs of three councils - Litchfield, Darwin and Palmerston - in the future has been favouring the Howard Peninsula because of the area and it is Crown land and immediately available to us. That consultancy is about to be let; I understand five tenders have come back, which we are now considering. That should go out late this month or early next month. In the scoping study, it will verify if the site is suitable for the future of regional waste facility and it will start to outline some of the issues that need to be addressed through future Environmental Impact Assessment and for more detailed design if the site is suitable.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. One other question, also the recent problem. Minister, you would know there are two blocks of land that was subdivided many years ago on the Howard River mouth. One belongs to Billy Boustead and one belongs to Dixie Kaissis, who runs the Shoal Bay Boat Hire. I am not sure what the conditions of the sale of that land were but, as you know, many tourists and local people go there. They drive along a road - and I put that in inverted commas. I did speak to a member of your staff and asked whether the road could be graded, simply because it had been washed out by the effects of Cyclone Monica. Is there any solution to providing a public access to two blocks of land that presently are 16 km away from any public access?

Dr BURNS: Okay, member for Nelson, I will answer this question as best I can. I will rely on some detail or correction should I be incorrect. As you rightly point out, the blocks of land in question were owned by Mr Bowstead originally. The condition of sale to him was that there was no access provided. Basically, when the current owners bought that land, the title and the plan of that land showed clearly that there was no access. They have come to government, wanting government to fund works on a road that is, essentially, a private road. Although it goes across Crown land, it is a private road. I also understand that the current owners have been in discussion with the Litchfield Shire Council on some issues. I defer to Mr Wharam. If you could address the Chair, Mr Wharam, and identify yourself and your position to elaborate further on this issue, please.

Mr WHARAM: Paul Wharam, Director, Land Administration. As the minister has said, the block - and it is the Kaissis brothers who run it at the moment - was originally owned by Bill Bowstead. When Bill got that block, access was actually ...

Dr BURNS: It was actually Crown land, we had better specify that. The condition of sale was that there was no access.

Mr WHARAM: The access, for the purpose of issuing the title, was by the river. That was a decision of the Surveyor-General at the time. The other thing to take into account here - and you are probably aware of this - is that the Department of Defence has been in discussions as well about effectively moving the Shoal Bay area across to the Howard. That also impacts on the access provisions for the Kaissis block and for the block that Bill Bowstead is currently occupying at the top of the peninsula there. Essentially, as the minister has pointed out, that is the current situation. It really a private road or a track; it is not public.

Mr WOOD: Thank you for that. Minister, the reality is you are allowing, by default, travel to a block of land over Crown land, on a road which is dangerous. I am told there were two accidents recently because there have been bad washouts on it. Are you not, in a way, giving approval for people to use that road by not cutting it off for access?

Dr BURNS: No.

Mr WOOD: You have not arrested anyone for using the road, have you?

Dr BURNS: It has been an informal arrangement for a long time. I will come back to what was said before; it is a private road. If we start grading private access roads all over the Territory, where will it end?

Mr WOOD: I understand that, minister, and that there were historical reasons for what has happened. You mentioned about my time as Litchfield president, and when the CLP was in power. We can go back in history *ad infinitum*; however, the reality is we have a lot of people using that road, especially tourists. We can either do nothing or look at finding a solution. Perhaps, minister, there may be opportunity for the government to bring in a number of people such as the council, the mining people, the tourism industry and your officers, to look at whether there is a possible solution to building a gazetted road, considering you are looking at a regional waste facility in the middle of the Howard Peninsula.

Dr BURNS: When the current owners bought that block of land, due diligence would have shown, or should have shown, that it had no access. They bought it at a particular value and now you are asking government to supply a road that will significantly increase the value of their blocks at taxpayers' expense.

Mr WOOD: Goyder did some subdivisions in about 1880, and people might have bought blocks then that could not be accessed. However, the reality is government made decisions, for better or worse. We can either not do anything - and do not ask me what is going to happen if we do not do anything - or we can look for a solution. Would you at least offer the good services of your department to look at whether there is some possibility for a solution to what will not go away: a decision by a previous government many years ago to sell land without land access to those blocks.

Dr BURNS: I am also roads minister, member for Nelson, and I can tell you that there is a lot of demand on the roads budget. Before I entered into any negotiations, I would want the people who own that block to pay for the road and for its upkeep. Why has it suddenly come back on to government? This road has been there a long time and, suddenly, it has become a problem and government has to put its hand in its pocket and spend.

Mr WOOD: I did not say the government only; I said if you sat down with people like the mining industry which takes large amounts of gravel out of that area, the council, and perhaps there are opportunities from

tourism because they were tourist grants and it is a tourist site. If everyone got together there may be a solution. I am not saying it is going to be easy, but I just think at the moment, minister, if we do not do anything it is just going to get worse and we will be back here next year asking the same question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I think you have asked that same question three times. Minister, do you want to respond to the latest question?

Dr BURNS: I am a reasonable sort of a person – or I think I am - member for Nelson. I am more than happy to meet the landowners at the Rapid Creek market any Sunday. Maybe you can arrange the meeting and you be there too. I am more than happy to sit down and discuss the matter with them. That is an invitation, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I will take it up with them in three weeks time.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes. Minister, your best guess at when the regional waste facility would be open for business?

Dr BURNS: Thank you for the question, member for Blain. I did speak about this when we debated it in parliament. The scoping study is going to take at least six months. There will be an EIS that will follow on from that, so we are looking at probably another 18 months time period there. Therefore, at least two years, I would say. I do not know whether Mr Applegate has any further comments in that regard?

Mr APPLGATE: No, minister, I certainly agree with you that we are looking at least a minimum of two years before the necessary approval processes are conducted, and then we can start more detailed design and, in consultation with the three councils, work out how they are going to take it forward.

Mr MILLS: When it is open for business, the impression I get is two years time before it is ready to formally consider. Is that what I understand your answer to be?

Dr BURNS: That is right. I see the point of your question now. In our initial discussions with Litchfield Shire Council, the question they asked was: 'How soon before we could move in and have our operations there?' Part of the scoping study would be looking at the establishment of infrastructure and a strategic plan for the establishment of that infrastructure, possibly starting off with an area for the Litchfield Shire and then expanding it to include Palmerston City Council. I believe that would be part of the scoping study, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. The reason I ask is, of course, going back to Palmerston with the Catalina Road. Has an application been approved by the department with regard to the use of the Catalina Road facility?

Dr BURNS: Thanks for your question, member for Blain. That is an operational issue and I defer to Mr Wharam or Mr Applegate. Mr Wharam, please, through the Chair.

Mr WHARAM: Palmerston City Council have lodged an application with us which is currently under consideration. We have had a couple of meetings with them to discuss the site. One of the issues there was conflict with an expansion of the sewage ponds by the Power and Water Corporation. I had a meeting with Power and Water Corporation people today and they have identified the sewage ponds will not come up far enough to affect the waste transfer station at the Catalina Road site.

We will now be going back to the Palmerston City Council in response to that application on that basis; that there is room there to build a waste transfer facility and probably the green waste facility that they require next door to that, but not a landfill site.

Mr MILLS: Okay, I understand. Do I get the impression that it is not far away before this can be signed off?

Dr BURNS: I defer to Mr Wharam, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr WHARAM: That is correct, it is not far off. Palmerston City Council has been pushing us on it, if you like, because of the rapid rate of fill at Archer.

Mr MILLS: Correct. That is why the regional waste facility has a part to play in this whole story in a similar way as it affects Litchfield.

Dr BURNS: Whenever councils approach me as Litchfield Shire did about their problems and ways in which government can support, we are more than willing to try to support. I am keen to work with Palmerston City Council to accommodate their waste disposal needs. I can give you that assurance here tonight, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Good. Minister, the final point on this is can you give me and other members an assurance that the transit from the current facility, Shoal Bay - is that the correct term? I am ...

Dr BURNS: Shoal Bay is Darwin City Council.

Mr MILLS: Okay, that is where the transfer would be taken from Palmerston, I understand, at this point, until the regional waste facility is in place. Will there be any pressure brought upon Planning to delay that transit from Shoal Bay to the regional facility?

Dr BURNS: No, we are trying to expedite the regional facility as soon as humanly possible. One of the issues is that Darwin City Council has done further investigations and they believe that the life of their facility has probably been extended by some 30 to 50 years. Is that correct, Mr Applegate?

Mr APPLGATE: At least 30, yes.

Dr BURNS: At least 30. I suppose Darwin is not planning to make a move in the foreseeable future, but we certainly want to accommodate the needs of Litchfield and Palmerston.

Mr MILLS: That is the point of my question, minister. I am aware of the extension to 30 or 40 years which would benefit anyone who has a contract at Shoal Bay; therefore, can I still be reassured that the needs of Palmerston and Litchfield will be addressed in a speedy manner so that we can have the regional waste facility rather than have to go through Shoal Bay for 30 or 40 years?

Dr BURNS: I have given you that assurance, member for Blain, but I should also put a caveat in there. Waste disposal is a function of local government and we would be looking for the local government to pull their weight in this regard. We have come forward with the scoping study at \$250 000, but the local authorities collect rates for the purpose of waste disposal and we would be expecting them to make an adequate and appropriate contribution.

Mr MILLS: Point taken - to make a contribution to land that has already been approved, yes.

Dr BURNS: Yes, we are trying to expedite that.

Mr MILLS: That is good, okay.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? That concludes consideration of Output 2.4.

Output 2.5 - Land Development

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.5, Land Development. Are there any questions?

Dr BURNS: This was the one that the Leader of the Opposition raised earlier but there could be further questions on it.

Mr MILLS: I will let it go in the interests of time.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, on that basis, that concludes consideration of Output 2.5.

Output 2.6 – Darwin City Waterfront Redevelopment

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.6, Darwin City Waterfront Redevelopment. I am sure there are questions on this. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will give the new witnesses a chance to settle.

Dr BURNS: It might be an idea, because I believe there will be a number of questions on this important issue, if I let those around the table introduce themselves for the benefit of members.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes. Please do that, minister. Can we have one person to introduce or ...

Dr BURNS: We will once people are seated. Starting with Mr Kirkman, if you could introduce yourself and say what your role is here tonight please?

Mr KIRKMAN: Andrew Kirkman, Chief Financial Officer of Darwin Waterfront Development.

Mr COLEMAN: Pat Coleman, Acting Project Administrator, Waterfront Project.

Mr SHIELDS: Alastair Shields, Director Commercial, Department of Justice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions, members?

Mr MILLS: Yes, first question. I do not have that many questions; however, answers may prompt further questions. You can appreciate I am sure, minister, that from the point of view of opposition with our responsibilities to keep levels of accountability within reasonable parameters, that we want to understand the financial arrangements – basically, the cost Territorians, both now and into the future, will be bearing as a result of the decisions your government has made. The first question is: can you outline the cost of the waterfront development at this stage?

Dr BURNS: This is a question which has been asked a number of times and there is a fairly simple equation there, member for Blain. There is \$144m nett in today's dollar. That consists of: \$91m in payments for community infrastructure including water recreation; \$115m in payments for the Darwin convention centre; and then less the property returns to the Territory which are estimated to be \$62m. Payments for the convention centre will occur annually over the 25-year life covering this building's concession period, before the centre is handed back to the Territory. So, the simple answer is \$144m nett in today's dollars.

Mr MILLS: It is a bit mind-bending to consider a figure in today's terms. We are here today, and I have a mind beyond the next electoral cycle to what decisions we make today will impact on future generations. At some future point, what is this \$144m in today's terms?

Dr BURNS: With all respect, member for Blain, today's dollars are really the only parameter you can use. Could I use an example to you member for Blain?

The *NT News*, 25 years ago or thereabouts, was worth 25¢. In today's dollars we pay \$1.10. In 25 years time, it could be well worth \$4. If you want to go down to the local paper shop and pay \$4 for your *NT News* you can, but I will keep on paying \$1.10 in today's dollars.

Mr MILLS: Yes, that is fine. I want to understand at what point are we talking about when you draw a line across and say: 'That is the end of it'. You have had all the construction, the sale of these assets, and the return to government, and then that figure is \$144m. What date is that? Is that 25 years away?

Dr BURNS: I said over the 25 years. I will repeat what I said. Payments for the convention centre will occur annually over the 25-year life covering this building's concession period before the centre is handed back to the Territory. We are talking about 25 years.

Mr MILLS: Okay. But it is, though, a guess is it not, because there are some ins and outs that allow you to arrive at that figure?

Dr BURNS: I described the basic equation which is, from memory, \$91m for the community infrastructure, \$115m for the convention centre and also less the property returns which is \$62m. The nett is \$144m in today's dollars.

Mr MILLS: It is going to be a difficult one for opposition and anyone who wants to have a good look at it to crack, particularly when we find - and this be a preamble. It will not be too long. It is just that the budget

papers do not contain a consolidated view for proper appraisal of this project which impacts upon future generations. Do you have any concern, minister, that with the track record of private/public partnerships that it binds government closer to private interests rather than public? Do you have any concerns at all?

Dr BURNS: Addressing the assertion that the member for Blain made about not being able to find things within the budget, there is a \$100m waterfront commitment by the government for 2006-07, as noted in page 1 of Budget Paper No 1. This includes an estimated \$38m in payments to the consortium for community infrastructure work and an estimated \$62m in accrued commitment for the work completed on the convention centre during the year. To address the first assertion you made, member for Blain, it is there in page 1 of the budget papers.

There was a second part of your question which you should repeat, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Yes, it is actually the most important part: are you, minister, as a representative of the interests of Territorians, in any way concerned about the issue of public/private partnerships which binds governments closer to the private interests rather than public?

Dr BURNS: I find that an amazing question from a representative of the CLP which were involved in PPP on the railway. Governments of both colours have been involved ...

Mr MILLS: With respect, minister, this little ...

Dr LIM: You are wrong!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, let the minister answer, please.

Dr BURNS: ... PPPs. It was all right for the railways but, now, it is not all right for the convention centre. It just seems to me that, in my experience since this project has come up, that the opposition has not supported it. People who are in this place no longer were very clear about – and I think the member for Blain might have been quite negative on some occasions as well. You do not like this project. Let me tell you it is a great project for the Territory; Darwin; and tourism in this place. I fully support it and I just cannot wait to go down for my site visits. I love to go down there on a fortnightly visit and see the wonderful work that is going on there, and the happiness of the workers who are down there building this tremendous thing. They are really putting their heart and soul into this, and it is fantastic.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I have tears in my eyes. I can see it now.

Mr WOOD: Want a hanky?

Mr MILLS: No, I will be fine. I will cope.

I really do not want to go into that business because it is equally alleged that your government that you represent called the railway a 'faded dream'. So, let us forget that silly business. Our responsibility in opposition is what we are doing here; to try and gain some level of satisfaction that we are doing our part to ensure that we are accountable for decisions that are made in this parliament. That is what the purpose is.

Before I go on to my next line, is the issue of the cost to prepare the site included in this ...

Dr BURNS: This is remediation works of any contaminated soil?

Mr MILLS: Yes, that plus the removal of existing buildings and the preparation of that site ready for handover to the consortium.

Dr BURNS: I defer to Mr Kirkman on this. Can you answer that, please?

Mr KIRKMAN: Those costs are part of the contractual project costs of the \$144m.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that. However, they are costs that we all bear as Territorians, so I am wondering what that cost is as part of the equation that helps us to remain in the position of being able to hold government accountable for the costs that they have incurred on our behalf.

Dr BURNS: It may have been a cost but already it is a positive, member for Blain. The site is looking fantastic. A lot of that industrial infrastructure is gone; it is looking great. As Mr Kirkman said, it is part of the total cost and it is a worthwhile investment.

Mr MILLS: No, do not get me wrong; it is not veiled criticism here. I just want a clear figure of how much it cost to prepare the site.

Dr BURNS: I will refer to Ms Butterworth who says she has the clear figure there.

Ms BUTTERWORTH: Sarah Butterworth, CEO. All of those works are included on the capital works program, so your opportunity to monitor that is through seeing what is on the works program each year. The program initially started in 2003-04 when we did the environmental impact statement, which was charged to capital works. Some of the demolition work was done in 2004-05, and now the remediation work, the McMinn Street access, the water main, the electricity, and so on, to the site are all included in the capital works program.

Mr MILLS: Is there a consolidated list?

Ms BUTTERWORTH: This one has ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Through the Chair. Minister.

Dr BURNS: I am prepared to table it, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. I am sure there is nothing to hide, it is just that ...

Dr BURNS: There is nothing to hide!

Mr MILLS: No, I know there is not; you are open and honest and transparent ...

Dr BURNS: We want to showcase this wonderful development.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to answer to the question, minister?

Dr BURNS: No, I have tabled and the member for ...

Mr MILLS: Thank you; that is all I was after. There was no tricky question, I just wanted to have an update.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is why you have it now. Next question.

Mr MILLS: I am happy. Minister, a consortium partner got a certificate of exemption to a \$7m contract. Why is that? I can elaborate. We noticed there was a certificate of exemption listed in the paper for a contract to build a power substation.

Dr BURNS: If that is the case, that would be Power and Water.

Mr MILLS: It would mean there is a ...

Dr BURNS: I know from my past history as Minister for Essential Services, there is a new substation being built to service the city, not just the waterfront. There may well have been a certificate of exemption there because of the specialised nature of some of the equipment. However, if it is Power and Water, I suggest that you direct those questions to Power and Water. Are you aware of ...

Mr MILLS: It is not related to the waterfront development?

Dr BURNS: Indirectly it could be. One of the problems that we have had - and I am not trying to take the thunder of the Essential Services Minister who has already been here - is that, basically, we have been reliant, particularly in the CBD for a long time, on one substation. It was time to diversify and share the risk. That is my understanding of that particular project. It probably would be best directed to Power and Water.

The works that I am aware of directly related to the waterfront are the provision of headworks to the site. These are occurring down McMinn Street. There is power, water and also sewerage works there. We have

a figure for that as well. Mr Kirkman, did you want to speak about that? Oh, it is in the list that I have already tabled. I have given you mine, member for Blain.

I know there are some local companies that have got some. Wolpers Grahl have some of those electrical works. They are valued at several million dollars. I do not know, Pat, whether you want to talk about some of those works down McMinn Street?

Mr MILLS: Before we go on – sorry, minister - just so we do not get on the wrong track. It is specifically related to a \$7m certificate of exemption that, obviously, would have gone through Cabinet. I just want to know whether that was related directly to the waterfront development.

Dr BURNS: I believe I have answered that question. Ms Butterworth is according with this; that it is not part of the waterfront development. It is work carried out by Power and Water, and I suggest that you ask them when GOC comes in on Friday before this committee.

Mr MILLS: If that is the case, I will leave it until Friday. I presume, minister, that you would know, as a member of Cabinet, about approving a certificate of exemption to that magnitude.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you want to take that question?

Dr BURNS: I believe those questions are best directed to Power and Water. You can ask Power and Water about that, and the circumstances of that certificate of exemption. Remember that Power and Water is a government owned corporation and has different processes than other departments. I suggest that you ask Power and Water when they appear before you on Friday morning.

Mr MILLS: Minister, do I take it from that that you are unwilling to speak about this?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain, I believe the minister has answered the question.

Dr BURNS: We are talking about the waterfront here, member for Blain, and I am more than happy to talk about all the works associated with the waterfront. I freely tabled the document detailing the works and, as you said, everything is open and transparent. This is the output area for the waterfront. You seem to be going off into Power and Water, staff of which are appearing here on Friday. I suggest you direct your questions to Power and Water. I am more than happy to answer any question that directly relates to the waterfront.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain, I think he has answered.

Mr MILLS: Okay, thank you. I presume that, therefore, this does not relate to the waterfront. That is what you are saying?

Dr BURNS: I am saying that, and that is what my departmental advice is also.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain, next question.

Mr MILLS: That will do.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Minister, how many people will eventually live at the waterfront?

Dr BURNS: Well, there are several stages of the waterfront. All up, 2500 I am advised, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, has there been any planning for the increase in sewerage for this particular development?

Dr BURNS: The headworks are in place, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, presently, of course, you know the sewage all comes out at Larrakeyah. Is there a fair chance it will come back to the waterfront?

Dr BURNS: Once again, I am responsible for the waterfront. That is a question you should be asking Power and Water. No doubt, you asked similar questions of the minister this afternoon, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, under Transport Safety, it says you administer marine pollution. Have you any idea whether the water in the waterfront development could possibly be polluted by the sewage outfall? I heard that, I knew the answer already. The strange thing is that you can dump plastics and poo into the harbour from a ship and get in a lot of trouble, but you seem to be able to do it from the land, and not ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What is your question, Mr Wood?

Mr WOOD: I just want to know, has anyone tested what the water quality will be like at the waterfront, considering there will be a wave pool as well as, I think, a recreation pool and, not far up the road, there is a raw sewage outlet.

Dr BURNS: Well, regarding the consent through the consent authority given to that particular project, all those issues would have been addressed in detail, member for Nelson. The issue of the disposal of sewage was raised in parliament last week. The Minister for Essential Services gave undertakings about that, and I am sure you will be raising these issues with Power and Water when they appear before this committee on Friday.

Mr WOOD: I will be turbocharged, minister, on this issue. Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I have finished on that one.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, thank you very much for telling us out. That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

Are there any other non-specific budget-related questions? That not being the case, the committee will now move onto Transport and Infrastructure. We will just take a fraction of time out to let the new witnesses settle in.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – TRANSPORT **Output 3.1 – Transport Policy and Planning**

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 3.0, Transport, Output 3.1, Transport Policy and Planning. Are there any questions? Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: I have one, thank you. Minister, under Transport Policy and Planning, has this government given any consideration to alternative forms of transport - I mean in one area, light rail, and second, the use of alternative fuels such as hydrogen, which we believe may be a by-product of the clean fuel project that could possibly be used in public transport such as buses.

Dr BURNS: I thank the member for his question. A light rail corridor exists between Darwin and Palmerston so that is an option that can be taken up at a future date. Regarding alternative fuels within the bus network possibly and other transport modes, I defer to Mr Bigg. Perhaps you could address your comments through the Chair, Mr Bigg, stating your role here this evening.

Mr BIGG: Chris Bigg, Executive Director, Transport. The only trial there has been on alternative fuels - and it really is not an alternative fuel - is the biodiesel trial for buses. There is no consideration at the moment for fuel such as hydrogen.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. I refer back to the minister. At the moment, Perth is actually doing a trail of three Daimler Benz buses using hydrogen. I ask the minister whether the government would at least keep it in the back of their minds that we may have a hydrogen plant in Darwin, and there could be a possible clean fuel source available for our transport system here.

Dr BURNS: I would be very interested in that, but whenever I hear the word hydrogen I always remember the *Hindenberg*.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you would also remember when I was President of Litchfield Shire Council when the CLP was in power so, we do not go back too far. They are using them in Perth this very moment.

Dr BURNS: I am very interested to learn more. Jokes aside, I am very interested in this. It is incumbent on us all to try to reduce greenhouse emissions.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I am going down to Perth in August for a big conference on alternative fuels. I am happy to report back on those alternative

Dr BURNS: You can come and see me at the markets most Sunday between 7.30 am and 12 noon.

Mr WOOD: You have not told me if the bananas are any cheaper. While they are not ...

Dr BURNS: They are cheaper.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can we have a bit of order. Come on, we are wasting time. Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Sorry. That is all, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Dr LIM: About three years ago, the former minister for Transport announced with fanfare that the Northern Territory government was going to utilise many of the hybrid motor vehicles in the government fleet - vehicles such as the Prius. Can you tell me how many Prius are now running in the Northern Territory government fleet?

Dr BURNS: That is more a question to NT Fleet, which we will come to as part of our GBDs, member for Greatorex. If you can save that question until we get to that GBD. We do have the officers here; it might be better if they answer that question.

Dr LIM: If we get to that question. This is part of transport policy, I suppose, and that is why I am asking it here.

Dr BURNS: I am aware of a number of government Prius vehicles in service, but I am not sure of the exact number, I am sorry. I will just have to defer when we get to that particular area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take that question on notice then, minister?

Dr BURNS: Oh DEET. Well, NT Fleet is in DCIS.

Dr LIM: So we might not get there.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take that question on notice then minister?

Dr BURNS: I will take it on notice for you, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, member for Greatorex, I ask you to restate the question.

Dr LIM: I asked the minister to provide the number of hybrid motor vehicles that are in Northern Territory government fleet in accordance with the policy that was announced by the former minister for transport?

Dr BURNS: Thank you, member for Greatorex. I accept that question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I allocate No 7.3 to that question.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, if I could go further? I ask the minister to break up the figures into which departments and how well they are distributed across the Territory.

Dr BURNS: I will, member for Greatorex

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to incorporate that?

Dr BURNS: I am more than happy.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Again, that is incorporated into question on notice No 7.3.

Dr LIM: No other questions.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Transport Safety

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 3.2, Transport Safety. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many staff do you have employed in Transport Safety section?

Dr BURNS: I defer to Mr Bigg, or Mr Papandonakis is here also.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I also wanted to know what classification they were too?

Dr BURNS: Sure. Did you want to answer that, Mr Bigg?

Mr BIGG: Chris Bigg, Executive Director, Transport. There is a total of 23 staff. There is one ECO1 officer; two P4 officers; two P3 officers; two P2s, one AO8; and one AO7. Yes. We are doing that from memory from 23 people.

Mrs MILLER: Well, you are not doing bad. Would you like to get that information to me later?

Mr BIGG: Sure.

Dr BURNS: Through the Chair, we will accept that question.

M DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to get that back before the end of this session.

Mr BIGG: We will be able to get it back to you before the end of this session.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, are you able to tell me where those employees are located?

Dr BURNS: Once again, I defer to Mr Bigg.

Mr BIGG: Because it covers marine safety, rail safety and road safety, most of the staff are obviously located in Darwin. All are located in Darwin with the exception of a road safety officer in Alice Springs ...

Mrs MILLER: One?

Mr BIGG: ... and a road safety officer in Tennant Creek. Obviously, marine is located on the coast. The two professional rail safety staff are also located in Darwin, and most of the road safety staff are located in Darwin.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. How many reviews have been undertaken by the Transport Safety Department in the last 12 months, and have you any planned in the next 12 months?

Dr BURNS: Member for Katherine, I have been speaking publicly about a road - we are talking about road safety here?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, we are.

Dr BURNS: A Road Safety Taskforce which was made up of officers from police, obviously this department here, health, and I am not sure whether there are any other offices involved from other departments?

Mr BIGG: From Justice.

Dr BURNS: From Justice. They have undertaken a very comprehensive review of road safety issues in the Territory. I asked for an evidence-based review and that is exactly what they have done. That report has now come back to me and government for consideration. It is very far-ranging and far-reaching and really looks at all the options. Basically, it is what is required to address the serious road safety problem we have in the Territory.

I am very keen to engage the public in discussion on these issues as I believe that, without the support of the public, a lot of this comes to nought because a lot of it comes back to behaviour on the roads. We find people are driving under the influence of alcohol, well over the legal limit, are running red lights and not wearing seat belts. We have young drivers who are three times over-represented in road statistics, which is very concerning. As a community, we have to have a good hard look at where we are in the Territory: three times the national average of road fatalities. We have to engage and have a very serious discussion. Everything is on the table member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, when will the results of that review be available to the public?

Dr BURNS: Currently, it is with me and discussions are taking place in government. I am keen to release the data within the next six weeks. Obviously, I have been talking about some of the more striking statistics in there: the 2500 people who ran red lights in Darwin in a 24-hour period; and the number of crashes by red light running in Darwin alone in the four year period 2000 to 2004 is approximately 200. There were injuries associated with half of those and there were fatalities involved in four.

I believe that more and more people are running red lights. It is a big concern and there is nothing worse than a T-bone accident. I know that you have had personal experience recently, member for Katherine, and I would value your support and input into this whole debate about the issue. I believe that you probably feel very strongly about the issues as well.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I certainly do. The number of disgusting things I have seen on the road in the times that I have travelled has been absolutely appalling, because I travel a lot: running double white lines, the speeding - I am usually the last one left in the line and they have all gone past. It is really very bad.

You have stated in your quality performance measures in Budget Paper No 3, page 159, that you estimate to decrease the road toll in 2006-07 by 10%. You also stated last year that you were going to do that too; that you anticipated it would be decreased by 10%. Unfortunately, that did not happen last year. How are you going to do this?

Dr BURNS: A very good point, member for Katherine. This decrease - or the proposed decrease - is to a large degree what we aspire to. However, it has just come home to me, particularly in the last year with the horrible year on the roads in the calendar year 2005, that we would be doing a lot better in 2004 - and we did compared to the three-year rolling average. Then, 2005 just blew everything out of the water. That is when I understood that things, indeed, were not trending down. If anything, they were probably trending up and there was no appreciable change. That is when I asked for this comprehensive report.

There is the issue of enforcement. That is a very important issue. There is the issue of the regime of penalties. I have been asked many times about demerit points and, as a community, we have to have a discussion about demerit points. There is the issue of young driver training and what is being trialled in other states of young people having to spend more time behind the wheel as a provisional driver before they get their full licence. There are a number of measures.

What I told the task force was that I want the evidence. I want the evidence from the literature that, if you do X, you are likely to get Y.

We can all take heart from the example in Victoria. Since the late 1980s, they have reduced their road toll by about 50%. There have been a whole suite of strategies that they have implemented there, and much of it is about changing driver behaviour.

We have to look at everything. We have to look at the penalties we have for not wearing seat belts. We have some of the lowest penalties in Australia for people not wearing seat belts. Regarding the gap between 0.05 and 0.08, we are amongst a few states and territories where people do not lose their licence necessarily in that gap.

I met some people outside Parliament House today who were very upset about the penalty that was handed out in the case today. I cannot really comment about a specific case, but they put their views to me very strongly. They were feeling very strongly after that case that they believe minimum sentences should be raised.

As a community, we really have to have a look at all these things. I am very keen to have that discussion and for us to move on as a community with clear goals about reducing our terrible road toll.

Mrs MILLER: In the reply you have just given me, you have covered a lot of areas which are areas of concern that I share, and I am sure everybody here shares the same areas of concern.

One of the interesting things I have noted, minister, is that you have been quite vocal about not having a demerit system in the past. I must confess I am not very keen on one either. What has made you change your mind, because you have lately voiced a different opinion about the demerit system?

Dr BURNS: That is true, member for Katherine. I go back to the horrendous road toll in 2005 and the grieving families. People and families approached me on this issue. For every road statistic – what we call a statistic – there is a real family. It could be someone's mother or father, or someone's sister or brother, or someone's sporting friend or work colleague. The personal cost to our community is immense. In regard to the monetary cost, a Queensland academic estimated that it was about \$330m per annum for the Territory, so there is an incredible financial cost as well.

As I said, I have come to the point where we have to put everything on the table and have a discussion as a community. I wanted to find out the evidence about demerit points. What I found out was that people who do accumulate demerit points are more likely to have accidents. When people start to get demerit points, they certainly moderate their behaviour – the sort of behaviour that leads to accidents. Approximately 30% of licensed drivers, at any one time, may have one or more demerit points but, in the end, only 1% or 2% of that 30% move on to have their licence disqualified and taken away.

When I saw the statistics of repeat offenders here in the Territory – some of them must be intent on breaking the law. Possibly, Mr Bigg could talk about some of those statistics; the number of repeat offenders. It is quite scary, really, that these people are on our roads.

Mr BIGG: As the minister said, there is a large number of repeat offenders. Indeed, the 2500 red light runners at 11 Darwin intersections over a 24-hour period indicates the lack of respect that some people have for others' safety.

There are other things. A statistic that the minister quoted before is of 9480 drivers tested at RBT stations in December/January just gone, 2005-06. One in 42 was over the legal blood alcohol limit, compared to one in 314 in Victoria and one in 192 in Queensland over the same period. We have orders of magnitude of seven, eight times of what is occurring elsewhere in Australia.

Over a seven-week period over the same Christmas/New Year campaign, almost 5500 Territory drivers, or one in 22 or 5% of the total Territory driving population, were booked for speeding. In calendar year 2005, there were almost 1500 drivers - with our relatively low level of enforcement out on the roads - caught more than once for speeding: 209 were caught three or more times; several persons had eight, 10 and up to 29 speeding offences in that year. Therefore, we definitely do have a big problem with repeat offenders.

Mrs MILLER: We have some slow learners.

Mr BIGG: Some very slow learners.

Mrs MILLER: From the evidence you have regarding demerit points, does it show, for the states that have demerit points already and have had them for a lot of years, the ratio or percentage of fatalities

compared to what we would have here? What is the percentage of fatalities, because the demerit point system is not received well by some of those drivers in the other states, and it has not really reduced the road toll. Percentage-wise, what is the evidence to say that it will?

Dr BURNS: Compared to the Australian average, the Northern Territory has three times the fatality rate on our roads. I am not pretending that demerit points are the single answer. In the state of Victoria, which I have alluded to before, with about a 40% to 50% decrease in road fatalities since the 1980s, that is part of a whole suite of measures. I alluded before, member for Katherine, to the fact that there is evidence that when people start to get demerit points, they start to moderate their driving behaviour, which is the sort of behaviour that leads to accidents. Basically, that is a big factor, because we are looking at, particularly around this urban area, speeding, running red lights, all the rest of it; the sort of behaviour that is associated with accidents and not wearing your seat belt, etcetera. That is the reason and some of the thinking behind it.

As a community, we have to have a discussion about it. I would like to emphasise, member for Katherine, that there has been no decision made by government about demerit points. I am simply flagging that, as a community, we need to have a full and open debate about it. There will be some that will see having demerit points implemented here as a loss of a Territory icon. There will be others who will just say: 'Basically, it is not going to affect me because it is a voluntary scheme'. They will say: 'I do not speed, I do not do this, I do not do that. It is only targeting those who are repeat offenders'. It is a bit like drink driving; it is a voluntary scheme, but I would not advise anyone to undertake that voluntary scheme.

Mrs MILLER: I am sure, minister, that there will be lots more discussion on what should happen in the very near future.

Dr BURNS: I should make it plain, member for Katherine, that some elements of the public think that things like demerit points are some revenue-raising ploy by government. In fact, a demerit point system would actually cost government money to implement. It is nothing about revenue; it is about trying to change behaviours on our roads. I presented ample evidence tonight, at least on the key points, and so has Mr Bigg, that there is some very concerning behaviour there, and we should all be worried.

As I said, behind each statistic there is a family that grieves, friends who grieve, and workmates who grieve. All too often, when you read the paper, you see the multitude of messages there from people grieving over someone who was taken long before their time, particularly young drivers, with the sense of loss.

There has been discussion in the national media about roadside crosses or flowers. I am all in favour of that, just as long as they are not huge, because it focuses our minds: 'Someone lost their life there. A family member lost their life there'. Just so it is not too distracting or whatever, these are very simple and elegant reminders of the dangers we face on our roads, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I am very glad, minister, that there is not one sitting 10 km south of Aileron at the moment that has Fay Miller's name on it.

Dr BURNS: I am very glad too, member for Katherine, and it is great to see you back here.

Mrs MILLER: It is great to be back. We are running short of time. I am not quite sure, minister, if this is part of this particular line item but, what measures are in place to ensure that the vegetation that is growing along the side of the railway line is taken care of? Does that come under this – under safety?

Dr BURNS: It is my understanding that that is the undertaking from the proprietor of the railway, but Mr Bigg might answer that.

Mr BIGG: Member for Katherine, are you meaning within the fenced rail corridor?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Dr BURNS: I ask Mr Ernie Wanka to come to the table.

Mr WANKA: Ernie Wanka, Senior Director, Road Network. My understanding is that the vegetation maintenance within the railway corridor is maintained by the operator of the railway. They have period contractors who maintain that. They monitor the sight distances, particularly on the road approaches to the railway line.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. It is over two years now since that line was finished, so there are some areas where the vegetation is getting quite dense up towards the railway line, and it does look like it is a safety hazard.

Minister, has there been, at any time, a fire on a train in the Northern Territory that you are aware of?

Dr BURNS: Not that I am aware of, member for Katherine ...

Mrs MILLER: I believe there was one.

Dr BURNS: ... but I will ask Mr Bigg to respond to that.

Mr BIGG: I am not aware of a serious fire. There may have been minor fires. I have all the incidents here that have been reported in the last year, most of which are extremely minor. I cannot see any fire recorded there.

Mrs MILLER: There was not one was of a serious nature that required an inspector to have a look at it and make a report?

Dr BURNS: That would be recorded there, would it, Mr Bigg?

Mr BIGG: It should be. They have hitting animals, and one wheel was derailed, so I am sure if there was a fire of any sort it would be recorded here.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I am sure it would have been too. Minister, does cutting of the road verges come under your area?

Dr BURNS: It does but, once again, it is Ernie's responsibility.

Mrs MILLER: I am sorry about that. I should have him while he was still there. Up until the change of government, there were four cuttings of the road verges every year, and it was just lovely, really good. It was very safe to drive on the highways. The reason that I notice it so much is because I am on the road so much from Katherine to Darwin. Now we are lucky to have two cuts of the verges per year and it is quite dangerous in some areas. Can you tell me if you plan to increase those in the next 12 months on Territory roads and, if not, why not, because it really does pose a danger?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to Ernie in a moment about that. You are really talking about a national highway not a Territory road. One issue that has concerned me is the way in which the Commonwealth government is cutting back on its allocation for repairs and maintenance through the AusLink program. Historically, we have about \$18m per year under AusLink for repairs and maintenance. Under the new four-year program, it will ramp from \$18m down to \$14m approximately, at \$1m a year, which has an accumulative total of over \$11m. The Commonwealth is backing away from its repairs and maintenance commitment to our national highways, which is what you are talking about. That is of concern. The Territory is being expected to do more with less. However, for the specifics of your question, I defer to Ernie.

Mr WANKA: Basically, maintenance of our road verges is undertaken by our period contracts and is on an as needs basis where we do an assessment of the level of vegetation to go in and cut the grass. Obviously, it is useless in the Wet Season to go in and cut grass; it grows back quickly in the Wet Season. We monitor how often we cut it during that period of time. It is really an assessment of the needs that is out there.

Mrs MILLER: How many times do you plan for it to be done on the highway, for instance, between here and where it goes down the other side of Daly Waters, and gets quite dangerous there as well? How many times is it planned to do that in this next 12 months; leading up to the next Wet Season?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to Mr Wanka.

Mr WANKA: I do not have a specific number on how often we would cut that, but I can certainly find out.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. One more question. Minister, what are you doing about getting the road safety message into remote communities?

Dr BURNS: That is part of the Road Safety Taskforce. It is a hard and very important issue. I do not want to foreshadow what is in the task force report. I can tell you what we are doing currently. We are trying to get road safety officers to get that message across. Obviously, it is not working there, as it is probably not working in the wider community. We need a radical overhaul and that is what we are looking at within this task force report. I defer to Mr Bigg for current activities.

Dr BURNS: While Mr Bigg is looking for that, I have an answer to the question asked by the member for Greatorex about the Prius cars. I am informed there is a total of 11 of these vehicles in the fleet. There are two in Alice Springs and nine in Darwin. They are used by Power and Water, Chief Minister's, Health and Community Services, and also DCIS. I will table that for your information, member for Greatorex. Back to Mr Bigg.

Mr BIGG: Particularly looking at remote areas, there was a television commercial which went out on all the networks - Pause to Reflect - which was encouraging use of seat belts which, as you know, is quite an issue in the Territory, and also among Aboriginals. The Coffee Break Program exists throughout the Territory, particularly on our national highways and is aimed at fatigue. Combining road and rail safety, there has been a level crossing safety television commercial quite recently again. You may have seen that, member for Katherine.

In the latter half of 2005, there was a major campaign aimed at reducing the level of trauma experienced by vulnerable road users, in particular, pedestrians and cyclists. As you know, we have a number of Aboriginal pedestrians who come from the remote area and get hit in town.

Riding in the backs of utes, safe pedestrian behaviour, drink driving will continue during 2006-07, featuring on Imparja in particular. In actual fact, there is a sponsorship initiative from the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, CAAMA, for those remote area ads, the Barunga Sports and Cultural Festival. There was the road safety song competition with that road safety song is about to hit the airways soon. Nick Papandonakis was one of the judges. That is a bit of a kaleidoscope, member for Katherine, on what is happening in remote areas.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, any other questions?

Mrs MILLER: No, that is the end.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else have any questions? That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Public Transport

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will now call for questions on Output 3.3, Public Transport. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. I want to cut down my questions to try to get through some areas. The ticketing system, minister, on the Darwin public transport service has been really inefficient for quite a few months. Can you please tell me what is being done about that?

Dr BURNS: Government is in the process of implementing a new ticketing system. I expect that to be operational within the next six to eight weeks. Public announcements and education about the new system will take place within the next month. It will be a simplified and, in most cases, a lot cheaper way of travel - in terms of fares anyway - for the travelling public.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how much does it cost to get the system repaired?

Dr BURNS: The system has been struggling for some time; I suppose it is past its use-by date. The manufacturer who services the software and, to some degree, the hardware system said earlier this year that they would not service it anymore. I cannot give you a cost off the top of my head of servicing the system. Possibly, Mr Bigg or Mr Timson who has joined us now might be able to give you that information, member for Katherine.

Mr BIGG: Historically, it has cost \$30 000 to \$40 000 a year to service the system, but that has become academic as the services have been withdrawn and the system is no longer supported.

Mrs MILLER: In relation to the ticketing system not working efficiently, minister, how much revenue has the Northern Territory lost in the time that it has been working inefficiently?

Dr BURNS: I have said publicly that it is probably somewhere between \$250 000 and \$300 000 per annum. I also have to say it has probably encouraged a lot of people to start using our buses, and I hope they continue to do so when the new ticketing system is implemented. We want more people on our public transport; we want to reduce greenhouse gases. This has been a bit of a trial period for some people who might not ordinarily have used our public transport system. There will be a very simplified fare system and fare structure come into place within the next six to eight weeks, and I hope those people continue to use our great bus service.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, minister. Do multipurpose taxi licences come through you under this output?

Dr BURNS: It does.

Mrs MILLER: This output?

Dr BURNS: Yes, well, I am not sure of this output, but I am more than happy to answer the question, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Multipurpose taxi licences are issued with a reduced subsidy?

Dr BURNS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: How do you ensure that that subsidy is not abused? How do you ensure that those multipurpose taxis are used predominantly for disabled and handicapped people?

Dr BURNS: That is a very good question, member for Katherine. The way it works is that a licence fee of \$16 000 is charged on ordinary taxis; MPTs pay an annual licence fee of \$8000, which is cheaper. Operators of MPT vehicles would argue very strongly that these vehicles are a lot costlier to fit out and set up, and they need to advertise their investment over a longer period.

Regarding your specific question about whether we compel MPTs to pick up only disabled people, there is no way, currently I believe, that we can compel people to do that. Neither do I believe that people could survive solely on that business. We need to allow people to have some flexibility in what they do. There is a voucher system for disabled people which comes through the Family and Community Services element, under minister Lawrie, which enables disabled people to use a certain amount of vouchers depending on their category, to do their shopping, etcetera. Do you have any further comment about this issue, Mr Bigg?

Mr BIGG: Thanks, minister. As the minister said, MPTs need to have normal fares as well. They certainly are supposed to give priority to disabled when they call for them. It is really up to each MPT operator to make sure that they do give priority to the disabled. We are very conscious that it is an ongoing issue though.

Mrs MILLER: In the situation where that is being abused - where it is blatantly obvious that it is being abused - what course of action can be taken?

Dr BURNS: Obviously, if an operator is not fulfilling their duties and willingly saying that they are not going to take these fares, I would imagine there would be some disciplinary measures that could be taken against such drivers. Mr Bigg might elaborate.

Mr BIGG: This is a real issue around Australia. There are two issues here: (1) the commercial viability of the taxi business as the operator; and (2) the drivers who drive those taxis and their willingness to spend the time and get less revenue for themselves, because most taxis operate on the bailee/bailor system, where the driver, essentially, gets 50% of the takings. They are very interested in maximising their income. Any complaint from someone who believes that they are not getting a level of service that they require, or from a disability organisation, is investigated. We do follow up with both those operators and drivers.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much. That is all the questions I have.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, a question related to policy regarding bus passes for student travel. Minister, I understand that the purpose of this is to facilitate students who live some distance from a school to attend school and return home?

Dr BURNS: That is correct, member for Blain. I should emphasise that the issuing of bus passes and, indeed, school bus travel, falls within the ambit of DEET. We merely provide a service on behalf of DEET. The funding that comes to us to operate and the issuing of the passes is through DEET.

Mr MILLS: If we presume that it is to assist a student to get to school and to get home again, have your officers been instructed to not recognise passes that students would present say, on weekends, or out of school hours?

Dr BURNS: I will ask Mr Bigg to answer that question.

Mr BIGG: Mr Mills, you have raised a relevant issue. Recently, the rules were simplified for the use of bus passes. Bus passes can be used on any school day now.

Mr MILLS: At any time?

Mr BIGG: At any hour on a school day.

Mr MILLS: Did those simplified rules originate from DEET?

Mr BIGG: No. Perhaps George?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister?

Dr BURNS: Yes, thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. I will accept the question and ask Mr Timson to answer it.

Mr TIMSON: George Timson, Acting Director, Public Transport. The loosening up of the passes was something that we initiated through the department and the minister. There were some circumstances where drivers were becoming particularly rigid on the rules for the bus passes. Although DEET have a policy of allowing certain children to have bus passes where they live a distance from the school, we increased the accessibility of those passes by allowing schoolchildren with a valid pass to travel Monday to Friday, providing it is a school day, any time that the bus network is operating.

Previously, these passes were restricted to 6 am to 6 pm and had conditions aimed at predominantly school-based activities. The conditions are now loosened up and quite simple to understand, and are reflected on the back of the pass.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I assume, therefore, a student or a group of students who decide not to attend school on Tuesday and spend the day at Casuarina can travel free on the bus?

Dr BURNS: Member for Blain, bus drivers are not truancy officers. Unless there is a uniform, there might be some reason why those students are going to Casuarina. It is a bit beyond the job description of bus drivers to be truancy officers.

Mr MILLS: That I accept, though, unless we take a whole-of-government approach, we are not going to make any achievable gains. I put it to you, minister, that, in the interests of making it an easier system to administer, we have made it difficult to allow to direct our students to understand how this privilege should be utilised, to and from school for study and learning.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you take that comment?

Dr BURNS: I will certainly mention your concerns to the Education minister but, once again, bus drivers have their hands full driving a bus and all the rest of it, and they do a fantastic job. As people would be aware, I have moved very strongly to increase security for bus drivers on our buses and not to tolerate any antisocial behaviour. If there is some positive and constructive way that bus drivers can have input into this issue, maybe that is a way we can do that. Obviously, they do observe a lot of things and they can pass information on.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. I totally agree with you, it is an immensely difficult job to be a bus driver, particularly in circumstances where it becomes much easier to accommodate an antisocial element if it does arise on buses, as it often does. Can you advise what progress is being made in increasing security on buses during school hours?

Dr BURNS: I did announce, member for Blain, the employment of a number of dedicated security officers on our buses. I believe that recruitment process and training is now under way. These people will have statutory powers, not only on buses but around interchanges.

The other thing we are doing is having targeted operations by police working with bus drivers, and information given by bus drivers, particularly around interchanges. I am very keen to stamp out antisocial behaviour and in and around buses. I believe it is a very important issue and I do not think we should be tolerating it.

Mr MILLS: Not at all.

Dr BURNS: The other thing we have is security cameras on our buses. I am very mindful of security and I believe I have built up a very good relationship with the bus drivers. I meet with them and the security working group on a regular basis and they are very pleased with progress, although we all recognise there is a lot further to go.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Lastly, just progress of that - I understand that there are some being trained. Can you tell me how many are being trained and will that also include training for Alice Springs buses?

Dr BURNS: I will defer to Mr Bigg on that issue.

Mr BIGG: Mr Mills, where it is exactly at is the jobs were advertised last weekend. There are four positions being advertised for the Darwin network. There will be none employed for the Alice Springs network full-time. However, if there were issues that arose on the Alice Springs network, they would go down and attend to those as best they could, in particular with training the drivers and anybody else associated with the public transport system.

Mr MILLS: My last question, to go back to the simplification of the use of the school bus pass. Is my understanding correct that previously it was 6 am to 6 pm? Now they can travel at 10 o'clock at night?

Dr BURNS: Member for Blain, it has been a while since I have used a school bus pass, so I will defer to Mr Timson on that one.

Mr TIMSON: That is correct, Mr Mills, the bus passes have been opened up to any time of the day and night. Many children, particularly in the senior years, study at various hours of the day and night and do other school-related activities. We thought it was certainly more important to ensure the children were able to get home later at night if they have used all their money, etcetera. We thought that was a much more important aspect to get children home safely or to a safe area, than to restrict the bus pass.

Mr MILLS: I will make no further comment at this point.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, I was surprised that you are not considering Alice Springs as worthy of providing security personnel on the buses. You will recall a statement I made during an adjournment where a bus driver was unfairly pursued by a child, a teacher, the child's parents and the police. Eventually, when it came to court, the judge dismissed the case altogether. This driver is up for a personal costs of thousands upon thousands of dollars for something he did not do. He was, in fact, doing his duty. You need to look at Alice Springs and address that. Would you do that?

Dr BURNS: If the member for Greatorex wants to correspond with me on that matter, I will certainly look into it.

Dr LIM: It is in the *Hansard*.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let the minister answer, please.

Dr BURNS: Well, you have raised it here. I welcome some correspondence from you setting out the particular issues and, if there are wider issues in Alice Springs in bus security, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: That is all, thank you.

Mr MILLS: I do have an additional question. That is two more than I thought I would have. How many bus passes have been removed from students for antisocial behaviour on buses?

Dr BURNS: I do not have the answer for that with me here. Possibly, Mr Timson could answer that.

Mr TIMSON: I am not aware of any passes that have been removed from schoolchildren. There is a process in place where bus operators have banning mechanisms and warnings on the bus for antisocial behaviour. Bus operators use that mechanism to control children who have misbehaved on buses, rather than taking away their bus pass *per se*, which is issued by DEET. They have a mechanism and there are quite clear codes of conduct and guidelines the children must follow. That action is taken for children who misbehave.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that?

Mr MILLS: Yes, I will not ask any more.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Just a couple waiting, quickly. They are all waiting for me, I suppose. Minister, has the government given any consideration to running a public bus service from Palmerston to Robertson Barracks, considering the number of people who live and work there?

Dr BURNS: I think you corresponded with me on this matter, have you not?

Mr WOOD: No, not that one, no.

Dr BURNS: I thought you had.

Mr WOOD: There are other issues too.

Dr BURNS: I thought it was about minibuses and ...

Mr WOOD: Oh, why it went broke, it might have been. Anyway that is another issue. This was about public buses.

Dr BURNS: I am sorry, Mr Deputy Chairman. I might defer to the operational people in this regard. I am not sure whether you want to answer that question, Mr Timson.

Mr TIMSON: We have given quite a bit of thought to that service and we have been liaising with Robertson Barracks personnel about the suitability of that service, etcetera. There was a private service operating at one point in time. The demands for the service are not super strong. There are periods where there may be a bit of patronage, but the service at this time is not being followed through. The passenger numbers seem to be quite low.

Mr WOOD: Minister, would you at least consider a trial?

Dr BURNS: I am advised that there is consideration. There is an election commitment in the 2007-08 year so certainly we will stand by that commitment.

Mr WOOD: The second question is: Cobb & Co have a contract with the school bus service in Alice Springs. Would the minister consider a variation to this contract to cover children in town camps?

Dr BURNS: This is a question from the member for Braitling.

Mr WOOD: I forgot to mention that, sorry.

Dr BURNS: I think she is in negotiation with the minister for Education on this issue. It is a funding issue and more properly rests with him.

Mr WOOD: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 - Transport Assets

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on output 3.4, Transport Assets. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: In the interest of time constraint, no, because I have something else.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions.

Mr WOOD: Quickly one, yes. Minister, you had \$0.2m – that makes it sound impressive – for new and replacement bus shelters. Is the Litchfield Shire going to get the bus shelters eventually?

Dr BURNS: We need to recall Mr Timson and, whilst Mr Timson is taking his place, I have an answer here. I think it was the member for Katherine who asked about the positions within the Transport Safety staffing. I will table that for the benefit of the member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr TIMSON: We certainly are looking at bus shelters for the rural area. As you are aware, Mr Wood, there are about a dozen or so refurbished shelters waiting to be restored. Our minor new works program has factored in a certain element to install those shelters. At this point in time, we also have a host of shelters in the urban area to be installed which, obviously, all come at a certain cost. We need to balance out what is fair between the urban and the rural area. We are working on a program right now to share that out, and we should see some installations in the second half of this calendar year.

Mr WOOD: I am very pleased to hear that. I think the balance should be one way. There is plenty of bus shelters in the urban area. No, I cannot say that. There is not too many in the rural area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Whilst I agree with you in some respects, I accept the answer of the minister. Are there any other questions.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. I am just going to clarify that you are going to put some of those bus shelters in this year in the rural area?

Dr BURNS: Please answer, Mr Timson?

Mr TIMSON: This is certainly our intention, Mr Wood, if it all pans out that way. Our intention is to install some into the rural area, predominantly catering for the schoolchildren in those areas first. That is certainly our intention.

Mr WOOD: We will give you some advice on where they should go.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We certainly will. Any other questions on Transport Assets, Output 3.4?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Output 4.1 - Infrastructure Development

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 4.0, Infrastructure Development, Output 4.1, Infrastructure Development. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. And trust me to have a lolly in my mouth at the time.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You may defer to someone if you wish, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I am going to paint a little picture here, so you understand it completely. It is either going to be just a yes or a no answer. The 2005-06 major capital projects list Victoria Highway, Stage 2 floodplain ...

Dr BURNS: This is roads.

Mrs MILLER: Sorry?

Dr BURNS: I think it is roads, is it not, that you are talking about?

Mrs MILLER: Is it? No. Bridges?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister?

Mrs MILLER: I am on the right output though, am I?

Dr BURNS: This is Infrastructure Development. As far as I am aware, this is a different output area. The next output area is Territory roads which I think ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question, minister?

Dr BURNS: I would just like to dispense with Infrastructure Development first.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is a fair enough point. Member for Katherine, do you have any other questions?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? Member for Nelson, any further question?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: All right. That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 - Territory Roads Output 5.1 - Road Network Management

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 5.0 Territory Roads, Output 5.1 Road Network Management. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Is this the right output now?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I think we are there.

Mrs MILLER: In the 2005-06 major capital projects lists the Victoria Highway Stage 2 floodplain upgrade was budgeted for \$15m. How many of the four bridges on the Vic River, Joe Creek, Lost Creek and Sandy Creek have (a) commenced and (b) been completed? That is part of it.

Dr BURNS: Just to set the scene here – I know I have to come down to a yes/no answer soon, member for Katherine

Mrs MILLER: No, it will be at the end.

Dr BURNS: The Victoria Highway projects are Commonwealth-funded projects. They are funded to the tune of 100%, although any overruns in costs - not overruns but any escalations in costs - which is occurring in road construction have to be met by the Territory. I point out - and I welcomed this at the time that it happened in the federal budget - the federal government has put another \$30m into this particular project.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Dr BURNS: These types of projects are worked in close collaboration between officers in the Territory governments such as Ernie and others and the Commonwealth officers. I will hand over to Ernie to answer

the specific question you raised about progress on this project. However, I will also say to finish that there has been extensive hydrological and engineering works carried out over a number of years on this particular section of road because it is so prone to flooding. The preparatory work has been done. I will hand over to Ernie to talk about where it is and where it is going.

Mr WANKA: The Victoria Highway project is in design at this particular moment. We have had to do a public and environmental report which is about to be released to the public for comment. It has to go through the process. That has taken us some time to prepare that public and environmental report. Because of the time it takes to advertise it and get comment and get sign-off by the minister, it will probably be around October/November period that we would be looking to get approval for that. After that, we are hoping to go out to tender early next year on that project.

Mrs MILLER: So, the answer is that none of the building of those bridges has commenced. That means that there was \$15m that was in the 2005-06 budget. Budget Paper No 3 2006-07 on page 153 lists that same project again and it says 'new bridges' - it does not state which bridges - with a budget of \$24m. I am assuming that that is \$15m revote plus an additional \$9m which is \$24m. Then the federal government has now chipped in another \$30m, I think it is. Does that mean that at long last Victoria Highway is going to have \$54m spent on it?

Dr BURNS: There is a cumulative total. I am not sure whether it is \$54m, I though it was ...

Mrs MILLER: \$24m plus \$30m makes \$54m, minister. There is tied funding of that \$30m from the federal government and the \$24m that is in the budget from the Territory government. That must mean there is a total of \$54m to spend on the much needed upgrade of the Victoria Highway.

Dr BURNS: It is not quite as simple as that, member for Katherine because ...

Mrs MILLER: I reckon it is very simple.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, let the minister answer the question.

Dr BURNS: Well, it should be but it is not. Because the Commonwealth, over a number of years now or in recent years, has said it will not meet any price escalations on any Commonwealth-funded project, basically, what every state and territory, including the Northern Territory, has to do is look at their suite of programs across the Territory and allocate funds from the global AusLink budget into various projects.

There are bridges and road works federally funded across the Territory, and that is what happens. It is not sleight of hand and it is with the agreement of the Commonwealth. If that is what the Commonwealth say to do, if you have a price escalation, which there has been in particular projects, you move the money around within your AusLink project. That is what happens. I will let Ernie comment further on that.

Mr WANKA: What the minister is saying is correct. We did have \$20m from the federal government for this project. In their latest budget, they have announced an extra \$30m, which is \$50m total for the project.

In the Northern Territory budget we were, basically, budgeting for what we had costed the project to be. The funding has been allocated accordingly on the program. Basically, there is a \$5m revote and \$24m project to make it \$29m for the four bridges, approach works, and some strengthening and widening in the Victoria River floodplain. That is the funding situation on the NT budget. Now, with the latest budget from the federal government, we have \$50m to spend which enables us to do a lot more work on upgrading the flood immunity of the Victoria Highway.

Mrs MILLER: My question is that it will be spent on the Victoria Highway?

Dr BURNS: Of course, it will, member for Katherine. I go back to the problem for the Northern Territory government - or the challenge might be a better word - the challenge for the Northern Territory government is that there is a suite of programs under Auslink. Some of them are 100% funded by the Commonwealth like the Victoria Highway. When I say 100%, they give X and that is supposed to cover 100% of the project, although the Territory government is supposed to work out the overruns.

Then you have a 50:50 project like the extension of Tiger Brennan Drive to Roystonia Avenue. That started off a number of years ago as an approximately \$27m project. Those costs have escalated above \$40m because of the increased costs of steel and labour and all the rest of it. That was a 50:50 project, so

the Territory was going to put in approximately \$13.7m and the Commonwealth was to put in \$13.7m, and that was going to be about approximately \$27m.

Because it is part of the national highway system or an Auslink system, and it has escalated to \$40m, the Commonwealth is saying: 'Well, we are still only putting in \$13m and you can put in whatever the balance is'. It is really a large challenge for the government. When you add that to the fact that they are winding back on repairs and maintenance - and I talked about an \$11.3m wind back over the life of the current program - it does present problems to government. As minister, it is a very difficult job to make ends meet. I am continually talking with Warren Truss who I believe I have a very good working relationship with. Other ministers all over Australia are telling him the problem we are having with national highways and the fact that the Commonwealth is drawing back for all sorts of reasons on this. Therefore, I welcome the extra \$30m. That is great, but there are still problems associated with it.

Mrs MILLER: Victoria River Bridge will absolutely love it, and so will the people of Katherine. I am just very pleased it is going to happen. I am finished.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, just one.

Mr WOOD: Minister, as you know, the government bypassed the Strauss Airstrip with the funding from the federal government, which helped. Could you say what was the original budget for the realignment of the Stuart Highway and what was the actual cost of the realignment of the Stuart Highway?

Dr BURNS: From memory - and Ernie will correct me if I am wrong - I think we are talking about \$13m plus another \$1.3m extra for realignment. Ernie probably has the figures so, through the Chair, Ernie, did you want to talk about that particular realignment and duplication?

Mr WANKA: The cost for the duplication was \$6.6m. I cannot recall the initial cost. I believe it was \$4.3m, around that figure.

Mr WOOD: Minister, would it be possible to find out the reasons for the overrun from what was budgeted to what it actually cost?

Dr BURNS: I will take that question on notice, member for Nelson, but I can assure you that the cost of constructing roads has escalated considerably over the last three to four years since I have been minister. I do not think I am to blame for it.

Mr WOOD: No.

Dr BURNS: I can point to at least a 30% to 40% increase in the cost of building roads and it is of great concern.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of this session, can you please repeat the question for *Hansard*.

Mr WOOD: Minister, would it be possible to have the budgeted costs, plus the final cost of the diversion, or the realignment of the Stuart Highway near the Strauss Airstrip, and would it also be possible to give us the reasons why there was an overrun?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate No 7.5 to it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: As we have run out of time, that concludes consideration for Output 5.1.

That also concludes consideration of all related output groups. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister attending, and also thank those officers who provided advice to the minister.

The committee suspended.
