

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Lambley to the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics:

Taxi Industry

- 1. When will the NT Government provide a response to the NT Public Accounts Committee report into the Taxi Licensing and Subleasing, tabled in Parliament in November 2017?**

The NT Government tabled a response to the Public Accounts Committee's finding on 10 May 2018, which was within the required timeframe. In the response, Government has addressed all 11 recommendations contained in the Public Accounts Committee's report.

- 2. Will the NT Government remove the cap on the number of taxi licences in Darwin and Alice Springs?**

With the recent introduction of rideshare services into the Northern Territory, it is appropriate that we provide stability to the taxi industry in the short term. This will provide time for the existing industries to adjust to the new regulatory framework and any possible impact that rideshare will have on their businesses.

Government has committed to reviewing the effectiveness of the new regulatory model early in 2020 to ensure anticipated outcomes are being achieved. This will include reviewing the future need for maintaining the cap on taxi numbers.

- 3. How many people are employed by the NT Government to provide monitoring and regulation of the NT Taxi Industry?**

The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics has a team of three specialist commercial passenger compliance officers which undertake complaint investigations, on road enforcement and auditing of the commercial passenger vehicle industry.

Regulation of the industry is also undertaken by 19 Transport Inspectors who are based in Katherine, Alice Springs and Darwin. Audits of the taxi industry are conducted by both the compliance officers and Transport Inspectors in all centres where taxis operate.

4. Has the Department of Transport made in any changes in how they are managing the Taxi Industry since the report was released in November 2017?

Since the findings of the Public Accounts Committee were handed down, the Department has been developing strategies in line with many of the report's recommendations. Primarily this will involve making the necessary adjustments to the regulatory framework to provide a sound legal basis for the Department to take clear actions against industry members who are found to be engaging in subleasing.

This will be supported with new and substantially increased fines for industry non-compliances which were introduced on 1 February 2018.

5. What changes are currently being undertaken within the Department of Transport to ensure the NT Taxi Industry is better monitored and regulated?

As identified in the Public Accounts Committee's report, the deficiencies in the regulation of the taxi industry are largely contributable to the shortcomings in legislation, specifically with regard to dealing with matters such as subleasing. Until the necessary changes to legislation can be effected, the Department will take steps to make it clear that subleasing is not lawful and that drivers must be engaged by operators under written bailment agreements, not verbal arrangements which is current practice. These verbal arrangements have been a main cause of confusion in industry, particularly with drivers. Mandating written bailment agreements between the operator and driver will provide clear responsibilities of both driver and operator. Additionally, the Department will amend all taxi licenses to include conditions which clearly make subleasing illegal and will ensure all parties are fully aware of how to legally operate. These new agreements will be auditable by the Department, with model bailment agreements published by the Department for industry's use.

In addition to taking a more proactive auditing role, once the regulatory framework around subleasing is finalised, the Department will commence the necessary work to assist industry transition to more transparent practices.

6. How is the Department of Transport providing greater “transparency and accountability” in their decision making?

The Department is continuing to progress the task of transitioning all internal policies to published information bulletins.

There are three commercial passenger vehicle (CPV) forums established being the:

- Top End CPV Forum;
- Central Australian CPV Forum; and
- the newly established Accessible Point to Point Transport Service Working Group.

These forums provide an avenue to raise and discuss issues with a range of representatives from the CPV industry, consumers, tourism, Government departments, councils and the Anti-Discrimination Commission.

7. Will the NT Government be changing legislation to improve the taxi industry?

Government is putting in place the changes necessary to ensure legislation supports the Department’s efforts to take action against industry members subleasing their taxi licences. I agree with the Public Accounts Committee’s finding that subleasing is not in the public interest and should not be supported by Government. It is for this reason Government will seek to effect the necessary legislative change to identify the subleasing of taxi licences as unlawful through a Priority Bill.