

The Estimates Committee convened at 8.30 am.

Mr CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I welcome you to the public hearings of the Estimates Committee.

I acknowledge that we gather this morning on the land of the Larrakia and pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging.

MINISTER FYLES' PORTFOLIOS

CHIEF MINISTER

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S OFFICE

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you today, and as we go through each output I will do the same.

Ms FYLES: Good morning, Estimates Committee. I too pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the Larrakia land on which we meet today.

Today I will have a number of officials with me: Dr Frank Daly, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; Mr Tim McManus, Deputy CEO Strategic and Corporate Services; Ms Emma White, Deputy CEO Policy and Reform; and Ms Maree De Lacey, Deputy CEO Territory Regional Growth; and Mr Jason Schoolmeester, Major Projects Commissioner.

We also have a number of independent officers who sit under the Chief Minister and Cabinet. They will join us at different times.

Mr CHAIR: I invite you to make a brief opening statement, then I will call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions. I will then invite the shadow minister to ask their questions first followed by committee members. They will follow a line of questioning from the shadow minister. Finally, other participating members may ask their questions. Other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by the shadow minister rather than waiting for the end of the shadow minister's questioning on an output.

Chief Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement regarding the Auditor-General's Office?

Ms FYLES: I wish to make an opening statement. I have one for the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr CHAIR: It needs to be related to the agency. If you do not have one for the Auditor-General's Office, we can move straight in and hold that one until we do the Chief Minister's.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy

Mr CHAIR: As there is no opening statement, the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill as they are related to the Auditor-General's Office. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

I remind everyone of the ruling I made last week about whole-of-government agency-related questions.

Ms FYLES: To clarify, I have an opening statement for the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Mr CHAIR: Are you happy with that?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No. Chief Minister's is later; it is Auditor-General. All the statutory authorities normally do their own thing.

Ms FYLES: In past years you have always done the opening statement first, but I am more than happy to go through the independent statutory bodies.

Mr CHAIR: We will do the independent statutory bodies first and then move to Chief Minister's opening statement.

Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy related to the Auditor-General?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Good morning, Auditor-General. In the past year, have you made referrals to NT police, ICAC or the Ombudsman?

Ms CRISP: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many have you made, broken down by those three bodies?

Ms CRISP: I have made one this year.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was that to police, ICAC or Ombudsman?

Ms CRISP: Thus far it is to the ICAC.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In your February report, you made a number of reports, as you always do. In the Local Jobs Fund, your report indicated that two projects had received about \$7.5m in funding, but they were not assessed using the fund requirements and not being monitored using the fund's processes. Could you please explain why that was of such great concern to you?

Ms CRISP: It is usual, and certainly better practice, to have established procedures for applications for funding, assessment of applications for funding and decision-making processes. It is usual for me to make comment where I have seen things that have not aligned with those procedures.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Essentially, is the jobs fund grant application process not operating at best practice?

Ms CRISP: I recognise that the applications are diverse. I respect the fact that there are times where there needs to be differences in evaluation of those applications. My concern is that once you bring in inconsistencies in practice, it is not as easy to evaluate whether things have been done as they should.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In your view were those two projects so different that they required a different process?

Ms CRISP: Not specifically, no.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was any justification given to you by government as to why the better practice process was not followed?

Ms CRISP: Not specifically. During the course of an audit we would ask what the process is. We would assess whether the processes have been followed or whether there is a better practice. There might be all sorts of reasons why things are assessed differently, but no specific justification.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What were the two projects you were concerned about?

Ms CRISP: I am not sure that I have specifically listed each of the projects that we looked at. Perhaps you could refer me to where you are looking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I cannot. You also identified in that report some issues with conflict of interest declarations. Can you describe what those issues were?

Ms CRISP: It would be customary for government employees to consider whether there are conflicts and to document whether there are conflicts or, in fact, whether there are no conflicts. Often in an audit it might be that people have declared that there are no conflicts but there has not been anything documented. The concern is whether there is something that has not been documented.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was there something that gave rise to that concern or was it more a general reminder?

Ms CRISP: Whether it is grant funding, applications or procurement, it is good practice to see that conflicts of interest have been discussed and where they exist, that they have been declared and managed. Part of any audit process we do looks at the due probity of the process to consider whether there have been documented conflicts of interest and whether they have been managed.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you were going through documentation for a grant and it did not have any notations about conflicts, did you go back to the agencies and ask them to clarify whether there were no conflicts?

Ms CRISP: It is usual that it would be line of questioning we would take. If there was no documentation, we would ask whether anything had been declared; and, if anything had been declared, how that would be managed. It may or may not be that further documentation is given to us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is there still work to go within government to make sure that conflict of interest reporting is as transparent as possible?

Ms CRISP: I would say that is the case.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: With respect to the Darwin City Deal you mentioned in your February report, you said that you were unable to form a conclusion on the performance management systems and recommended improvements to make sure the project was achieving its objectives of being economic, efficient and effective. Are you aware that your recommendations have been followed?

Ms CRISP: The Darwin City Deal is a complex piece of work in that it involves a lot of projects and a number of agencies. It extends beyond the Chief Minister; the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics is also involved. We found that there was not an overarching performance management framework that demonstrated oversight from the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet all the way through to the other agencies that work with it. Your question was about whether those concerns been allayed. We have not been provided any information subsequent to this audit that would address those recommendations.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When would you have the next opportunity to review that? Do you have to wait until your next audit process to go back, scrutinise and see whether they have complied with your recommendations?

Ms CRISP: In the context of a regular agency compliance audit or an end-of-year review, we go back every year and follow up for performance management system audits. Sometimes we would continue to audit an area of interest, but we may not always go back. I do not have an audit schedule to revisit for the Darwin City Deal in the forthcoming audit program.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What are the projects or areas you will continue to audit as a result of your February audit?

Ms CRISP: The audit program for the forthcoming six months has been established. It would be fair to say that in the six months between July and December we primarily focused on the financial statement audits for 30 June financial year end. We also undertake end-of-year reviews in each of the agencies at this time.

In relation to our performance management system audits that schedule or program of audits will not be established until I have greater clarity over what funding remains out of the output appropriation to be invested in that. There is a priority we undertake when setting the audit program. Financial statement audits come first and the work required to audit the TAFS, then it depends on what remains in the budget as to what performance management system audits we schedule.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The performance management systems audit has not yet been prioritised, is that fair to say?

Ms CRISP: Yes, that is fair to say. To put some context around that, we use a three-year period panel contract for our authorised auditors. The rates on that period panel contract align to CPI. In the last two rate increases was an increase of just under 6% in January 2022 and a further increase of 6.4% in January 2023. As a result of those rate increases we had to cut the forthcoming six-month audit program and try to redesign that to fit within the budget envelope. Until I get some clarity on where I think that will land and factor in any potential overruns, I am not sure how much discretionary budget there will be.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you not had a commensurate increase in your budget to match those increases in costs?

Ms CRISP: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How big an impact do you believe that will have on your ability to undertake audits and investigations of the Territory?

Ms CRISP: The three-year period panel contract will go out for tender in July. That panel contract will come into place from 2 January 2024. Until we have been through the tender process and seen what has come in we will not know what rates we are dealing with beyond January 2024. The short answer to your question is that whatever we spent last year we have a 6% increment on that in rates for the next six months. We just need to reduce the hours accordingly.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will that result in less work being done by the panel contract?

Ms CRISP: That is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will that also result in a reduction of staff in your office?

Ms CRISP: In relation to staffing in the office, we have had to redirect some of the employee expenditure budget towards the authorised audit service budget. Will that have an impact? Yes.

I anticipate that we will look at what we are doing structurally regarding the office prior to 30 June 2024. There are only five positions in the office, so restructuring is somewhat challenging.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is difficult—absolutely.

You also audited the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report and found that it violated section 15 of the *Fiscal Integrity and Transparency Act*. Is that correct?

Ms CRISP: 'Violated' is a pretty strong word.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It might be my word, not your word, knowing you, Julie!

Ms CRISP: It does not sound like my word. Is that the November report?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is on page 26, February.

Ms CRISP: That was for noncompliance with the FITA—the *Fiscal Integrity and Transparency Act*. That was in relation to the completion and tabling of the financial statements.

There were delays in completing the Treasurer's Annual Financial Statements this year, primarily as a result of some valuation exercises at one of the agencies. A valuation was done. The audit process found some issues with that valuation of assets and it needed to be revisited. It took the audit and the completion of the financial statements out past the scheduled time frame. It was not a significant delay, but, notwithstanding that, there is a requirement that the financial statements are completed prior to 31 October.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In the report, you found:

... A number of errors resulted from more than one agency accounting for the same asset, duplication of assets or the failure to recognise assets. This highlights the need for more robust accounting for assets and indicates further guidance is needed.

How problematic is it if there is duplication of assets? It highlights that if you are counting things wrongly, the figures commensurate with them do not add up. How problematic is this? Is this across government or is this just with the one agency?

Ms CRISP: A number of agencies were affected by their asset accounting this year and asset valuation. There was one agency in particular where our audit detected that there were errors in the revaluation model. That meant that things had calculated incorrectly.

We have made some recommendations about increased scrutiny of third-party valuation reports because that was ultimately where part of the problem was.

I am aware that the Department of Treasury and Finance has done a lot of work recently on putting some improved practices in place for agencies for not just when they are looking at the result coming from the valuer, but also when they are asking the valuer to do the valuations. We have seen some better instructions.

Some of the duplicate accounting relates to when there has been development of a block of land by one agency and then transferred to another agency. The Department of Treasury and Finance has done a lot of work on land titles to make sure that there is no duplication. That has been a big part of work that DTF has been very responsive with.

As part of the six-month audit program we are in, we have done a specifically directed audit at a number of valuations where we are looking at the instructions to and the data received from third-party valuers and scrutinising that in a lot more depth.

The figures are significant. The TAFS note disclosure has been transparent about what the challenges and restatements were; some of the errors identified were upwards of \$100m, which is significant.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You may remember the asset management system of days gone by that never came to fruition. Is there currently an asset management system capable of keeping accurate track of government assets?

Ms CRISP: There is a number of assets systems in place, and assets are recorded. There will always be a need for crosschecking of records to registers to ensure things are counted, valued correctly and counted only once. The Northern Territory Government is not unique in having issues with our set reconciliations at times. The broader work is that we rely a lot on fair values of assets and revaluations of assets. It is ensuring that the work is accurate prior to those results being captured in the asset register.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are they always done by third parties—non-government? The ones you had concerns with were non-government.

Ms CRISP: For the most part, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You do an enormous amount of auditing and scrutiny of government, which most people would not realise. How many reports do you produce each year?

Ms CRISP: It is a requirement that I report to the agency at the conclusion of every audit. Sometimes there may be more than one agency involved in an audit. In the current year we commenced approximately 113 audit tasks, and each one has at least one management letter. All the financial statements audits would also have an audit opinion. It is probably 200 reports across 113 audits.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How often do the Auditor-General's official reports that we get come out? They are the big reports.

Ms CRISP: The statutory requirement for those is that I report once per year to the Legislative Assembly. In practice, I normally report three times a year. We try to report in August for the six months work program up to 30 June; in November I try to report the audits we have undertaken of financial statements as at 30 June—as many of those we can get into the November report as possible. In February and March I pick up on any work that we tend to finish over the Christmas break, which is normally the performance management system audits. There are three.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You report above and beyond the statutory requirement?

Ms CRISP: It makes sense to me to report the findings, results and outcomes of audits as soon as practicable for them to have value and to be contemporary for members of parliament.

Mrs LAMBLEY: These are all substantial reports, many pages and a lot of work. One of the reasons, if not the only reason, I sit on the Public Accounts Committee is that you come and address us. Each time you prepare a report, you present it to the Public Accounts Committee. How do you present your reports to the government and Cabinet?

Ms CRISP: I do not. As an independent statutory officer, I report to parliament. All my reports are tabled in their entirety. I do not have specific briefings with the government of the day or Cabinet.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You brief the Public Accounts Committee on the content of your reports but not Cabinet?

Ms CRISP: Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Keep up the great work, thank you.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes the consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – AUDITS AND REVIEWS
Output 1.1 – Audits and Reviews

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance
Output 2.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I thank the Auditor-General for attending today.

The committee will now move on to consider the Northern Territory Electoral Commission. We will take a short break while we wait for the officials to move.

The committee suspended.

NT ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, just as your committee members are sitting down, I introduce Iain Loganathan, who is not unfamiliar to those in the room as the Electoral Commissioner.

Mr CHAIR: As the Chief Minister said, we are now moving on to the Northern Territory Electoral Commission. I thank Mr Iain Loganathan for attending today.

Would you, Chief Minister, or Mr Loganathan like to make an opening statement?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Good morning. This financial year the NTEC coordinated the conduct of the local government representation review and commencement of the NT electoral boundary redistribution for Legislative Assembly divisions.

The local government representation review is the first time that the determination of ward boundaries of local government councils were determined by an independent committee. Prior to this reform, councils conducted their own reviews with the minister being the delegate for any proposed changes.

The committee determined no changes to current ward representation with the exception of the City of Palmerston, where the committee determined that Palmerston adopt a three-ward structure and recommended an additional councillor for the 2025 local government periodic general election.

The NT boundary redistribution commenced in February with the first proposed boundaries released on 23 May.

The redistribution coincides with the Australian Electoral Commission conducting remote enrolment programs in the lead-up to the Voice referendum. The AEC has expanded its main enrolment program, the Federal Direct Enrolment and Update program—FDEU, also known as the automatic enrolment program—to include rural and remote areas of the Territory.

The enrolment participation in the Northern Territory as at March 2023 was 98.4% meaning that there are an estimated 17,573 eligible Territorians not on the electoral roll. The expansion of the automatic enrolment program will likely see a significant number of currently unenrolled electors added to the electoral roll from late June 2023.

This will cause some disruption to the redistribution process, and the committee is likely to release a second proposed boundaries report in consideration of the updated enrolment data. This would allow a further opportunity to provide comment on the draft boundaries.

There have been two LA by-elections in this period. The Fannie Bay by-election cost \$132,000, and the Arafura by-election cost \$190,000. The agency has conducted 12 local government by-elections at a cost of \$341,000. These elections are conducted on a marginal cost recovery basis, plus the 15% corporate overhead. Furthermore, the agency conducted five ballot services for enterprise bargaining under a services agreement with OCPE, using online electronic voting software. This has generated \$10,220. These elections are conducted on a marginal cost recovery basis. Four fee-for-service elections were conducted, generating \$15,542. These elections are conducted on a full recovery basis.

This has been a busy period with an unprecedented number of local government by-elections. I thank my staff for their professionalism, dedication and hard work. I will briefly talk about some challenges in democracy at the moment and for the future. The challenges in conducting elections in the NT are becoming more varied and complicated. Providing effective electoral services to remote Territorians, especially Aboriginal people, has always and will continue to be a challenge.

Although technology has greatly enhanced the way elections are managed, it also creates new risks. As electoral processes become more dependent on technology, the risks relating to cybersecurity threats increase. Worldwide, democracies are being undermined through misinformation and disinformation campaigns. In response, election management bodies are monitoring information and establishing registers to reinforce fact-based information about the electoral process. The rise of artificial intelligence systems being used to service disinformation is a serious threat to democracy. The impact caused by these threats to democracy are unknown and will continue to shift and evolve.

A core foundation of any stable society is a trusted democracy. It is vital and sufficient that resources are allocated to maintain and enhance election management systems that are secure and responsive to threats, allowing the NTEC to continue delivering elections that are fair and transparent.

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You mentioned earlier that Palmerston, for the first time, will receive wards. What consultation with the people of Palmerston did the independent panel do?

Mr LOGANATHAN: The consultation process is similar to a Legislative Assembly redistribution in the sense that we advertise to seek comment before the process starts. Once the draft was received—I recall that we met with the City of Palmerston at least four times to go through the process before it started when the draft boundaries were released. They were not supportive of the introduction of wards, so we met with them additional times for them to put scenarios to us. We did modelling on those scenarios and went back to meet with council.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When you advertised to seek comment, did anyone from Palmerston say that they wanted wards?

Mr LOGANATHAN: If I recall, I do not think there were any comments supporting wards, but there were not many comments received in total about this process. The vast majority of comments throughout the whole process came from councillors.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it correct that Palmerston Council does not support the creation of wards?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No-one from Palmerston wrote in wanting wards, and the council does not support wards. Why did the independent committee decide to create wards?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Why we thought it was appropriate is laid out in our report. In summary, for City of Darwin, when the population reaches a certain size, wards are a logical step in terms of the maturity of the democracy. Given Palmerston's growth, the committee felt that this was an appropriate time for Palmerston to be divided into wards.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Even though no-one who lives in Palmerston thinks that. How many people on the independent panel live in Palmerston? I would say zero.

Mr LOGANATHAN: I am not sure where the other two members live. I suspect that none of them live in Palmerston.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you think it strange that people who do not live in Palmerston would impose a Darwin view onto people in Palmerston, given that no-one in Palmerston has expressed that they want to move to a ward model?

Mr LOGANATHAN: I do not think it is a Darwin view.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you think Darwin has better democratic outcomes because of its ward system? I would not agree with that.

Mr LOGANATHAN: It depends what you mean by ‘democratic outcomes’. It comes to a certain point where you have so many people that it makes more sense to have wards than not to have wards. It is also much cheaper in regard to conducting a by-election for a small area rather than a large area. It is a matter of population size that at some point you move towards wards.

In regard to the scenarios Palmerston put forward to us, which included wards, it was supportive of a two-ward scenario. In our draft boundaries we proposed a four-ward scenario. After seeking feedback from Palmerston Council, the final proposal was for a three-ward scenario.

Mr CHAIR: I just remind everyone we do not ask for expressions of opinion. When asked, you do not need to give an expression of opinion, pursuant to Standing Order 109.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When will these wards come into place?

Mr LOGANATHAN: They will come into effect at the 2025 local government election.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was more consideration put on the fact that this would be cheaper for the NTEC? Was the cost saving a large factor of consideration by the independent panel?

Mr LOGANATHAN: No. Local councils pay for their by-elections themselves. Any savings would be for the City of Palmerston, not for us.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: With the redistribution, you mentioned that there are potentially up to 17,000 people not on the roll. Are you anticipating that the roll, at the end of this month, will be 17,000 higher than it currently is?

Mr LOGANATHAN: We are liaising with the AEC in regard to how many people it will enrol through this. We do not expect it to be anywhere near 17,000, but we expect it to be in the thousands. It is difficult for me to give an exact number at this point because it is based on letters, emails and SMSs that go out and the responses they get. In regard to having dialogue with them, we expect it to be in the multiple thousands.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As a result of that, there is likely to be an additional drawing of the boundaries based on the increased personnel, or based on the feedback. Will you merge the feedback you receive from the draft and the increase of people, or will you look at the increase of people, redo it and put it back out for comment?

Mr LOGANATHAN: The latter. That seems highly likely. What the act allows is that if there is a 15% change in any proposal, you need to go out and seek another round of public consultation. Given the numbers we are talking about, I cannot see us not having a 15% change.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I want to get a better idea about how the Electoral Commission has, for a number of years, tried to focus on Aboriginal participation in elections, which is fantastic; it is important that you do that work. I just want a better idea of how the Electoral Commission allocates RAMP days. For example, in the recent Arafura by-election, Maningrida—which has a voting population of 1,684 people—had five days of voting, but Wurrumiyanga had only two days of voting, yet it has a population of 1,105. How does the NTEC work it out? Is there some sort of mathematical calculation on how many days there are at each major centre as part of the RAMP?

Mr LOGANATHAN: There is no mathematical formula in regard to how many days we are there. The main thing we look at is what the past participation is, what the enrolment numbers are and what we can do to increase them.

Maningrida, in the 2020 election, had two days of polling. At the by-election, they were there for five days, but it was one afternoon and one morning, so overall it equated to a four-day period. That was an opportunity

for us to see, to trial, whether additional days of polling would increase turnout. In that election, we took 878 votes in Maningrida, compared with the 2020 election where we took 417.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was that the same for Wurrumiyanga or have you always had a higher voter turnout there?

Mr LOGANATHAN: No. We always had reasonable turnout there. We were there for two days at the 2020 election and two days for the by-election. The turnout was 50.23%.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you not want to increase voting in Wurrumiyanga as well?

Mr LOGANATHAN: We would like to increase voter turnout in all Aboriginal communities. Looking at where we could get the highest return, Maningrida is a community we highlighted in our election reports as it has the lowest turnout of any of the larger communities. We increased the voting period there and in Gunbalanya. Generally, the turnout is good in the Tiwi Islands.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the voter percentage turnout in Maningrida in 2020?

Mr LOGANATHAN: In 2020 it was 27% and it was 52% in 2023.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You said Wurrumiyanga in 2020 was ...

Mr LOGANATHAN: I have the figure for the by-election, which was 50.23%.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was Wurrumiyanga in 2020?

Mr LOGANATHAN: I do not have that figure with me.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I have that on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 5.1

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you provide the voter turnout percentage for Wurrumiyanga in 2020?

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 5.1.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: For a remote seat there are many polling days because you are out doing the RAMP, but every election requires a voting day. Voting day for the Arafura by-election was 18 March; is that correct?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That is correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Where could the people of Arafura vote on 18 March?

Mr LOGANATHAN: As you would be aware, Arafura is a remote seat, so the vast majority of polling was done through mobile polling. The only location polled on the Saturday was Jabiru in the morning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Jabiru was part of the RAMP schedule; is that correct?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was no polling for the Arafura by-election past 3 pm; is that correct?

Mr LOGANATHAN: I think it was earlier than that. It would have finished at 12 noon, and the team would have driven back for those votes to be counted that evening.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There was half-day voting on election day only at Jabiru, but Jabiru was a RAMP polling booth. Why was there not an election day voting place for the people of Arafura until 6 pm, like a normal 8 am to 6 pm election day?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Because it is a remote division. We liaise with the communities about what days they would prefer for polling and where it worked with our schedule. The other thing for us is that we need to get the ballots back to us so that we can count them at 6 pm on Saturday.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you saying that it is normal for a remote seat to not have an actual election day?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That is correct. The schedule in 2023 for the division of Arafura would have been a similar schedule in the sense that it would have been Jabiru for 8 am until 12 noon, and it would be the only polling in that division on that day. In a number of divisions, Gwoja and other remote divisions, many of them would not be polling on the Saturday within their boundaries.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I believe that has happened, but find it difficult that it is the case because every election has a voting day. Early voting is something we do by way of convenience to support voter participation. RAMP is critical because people live across the Territory in some of the most vast, outlying and remote locations. Bringing voting opportunities to people is fundamental.

Is having nowhere available for people to vote on an election day not a breach of the *Electoral Act*?

Mr LOGANATHAN: We sought advice on this; it is not a breach of the *Electoral Act*. The nature of elections are changing where we are not having an election day; we are having an election period. We are getting more people voting early, generally in urban areas, than we do on election day. We sought clarification on this. In our liaison with the communities, it is their preference and makes more logistical sense for us to get the ballots back to Darwin so that they can be counted on that Saturday night.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You could do both? You could open a voting centre and still have ballots back?

Mr LOGANATHAN: If we had one, for example, in a remote area that finished at 6 pm, our only option would be to count at that centre rather than in Darwin. We send out schedules to all the parties prior to it, and the preference has always been that the counting of the ballots occur in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine or Tennant Creek rather than in a remote community or town.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was that advice about whether it breaches the *Electoral Act* received from the Solicitor-General?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Northern Territory Electoral Commission closed its shopfront in Alice Springs. I am sure you will not be surprised that I am asking you a question about this. It never went down well with me. The NTEC closed its shopfront in Alice Springs more than four years ago, in January 2019. Are there still no permanent NTEC staff based in Alice Springs?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That is correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You talked about the challenges of democracy. Is the fact that shopfront was closed and there are no permanent NTEC staff anywhere in Central Australia a challenge?

Mr LOGANATHAN: We have had these discussions before. If you are talking about enrolment, the Alice Springs office was collecting a small number of enrolment forms. The vast majority of enrolment forms have come from the electorate offices within that town.

We still provide services to Alice Springs. We have gone there to connect Democracy Dash. That is an exercise we conduct in Darwin, and we go there two times a year to conduct it for the students in Alice Springs. We conduct school sessions as well. We are trying to replicate the services, but we do not have a permanent office there.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I know you do not have a permanent presence anywhere in Central Australia because of budget constrictions, restraints or limitations. When you talk about the challenges of democracy, having no permanent presence at all in Central Australia surely must be part of the problem?

Mr LOGANATHAN: The Electoral Commission does a minimal amount of enrolment activities. Our focus tends to be it is in the lead-up to elections when we would do enrolment activity. The vast majority of work is done by the Australian Electoral Commission. We use its roll to conduct our elections.

My understanding in recent discussions with the Australian Electoral Commission is it plans to have a permanent presence in Alice Springs to coordinate some of its enrolment activity—not so much in Alice Springs but in the remote communities that surround Alice Springs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: When will that be—soon?

Mr LOGANATHAN: I am happy to take that question on notice and get a response.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You do not have to answer that. I can ask someone else.

Mr BOWDEN: Is that also part of the automatic enrolment policy going forward that the AEC is going to be rolling out?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That question is best directed to the AEC. In discussions with it, particularly in the lead-up to the referendum, it had an intention to have a presence in Alice Springs and to have staff there to provide that service.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given the referendum on the Voice to Parliament, is it now going to set up an office in Central Australia?

Mr LOGANATHAN: It is best for me to not answer this question. They are questions best answered by the AEC.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am a bit stunned that it has taken a federal referendum for it to realise that we need something in Central Australia to promote democracy and voting. I have no more questions.

Mr BOWDEN: Is there an estimate of under-enrolment in the Territory, as in those who are not on the roll?

Mr LOGANATHAN: That is the figure that I provided earlier, which is about 17,500 people.

Mr BOWDEN: Therefore we have an issue with enrolment that the AEC—not in your department—is addressing in some way. Those on the roll who actually turn out, compared with Australia-wide, what are the numbers in the Northern Territory?

Mr LOGANATHAN: It would be significantly less. In a Territory election we get a turnout at a general election of around 75%. In a federal election the turnout is around 90%.

Mr BOWDEN: Is that nationally?

Mr LOGANATHAN: Nationally, yes.

Mr BOWDEN: It is quite a disproportionate difference.

Mr LOGANATHAN: It is.

Mr BROWN: Can you update on the automatic enrolment process? I am specifically looking for the engagement of my constituents in remote areas and the time frame of when this will be done by?

Mr LOGANATHAN: I will provide what I am aware about in terms of the information the AEC has provided, but this is best answered by the AEC, given that it is its process.

My understanding is that the AEC contacts the councils, in the sense that most of the councils provide the postal services, to make them aware of what the process is. It has teams of staff who travel around the communities and part of their job would be informing them about the automatic enrolment process.

Outside that I am not particularly sure about what the AEC does. I know that the notices it sends out to remote communities have been what I suppose would be described as translated into words that are easily understood so that people are aware of what that process is.

In terms of the timing of these programs the AEC has a specific program targeted towards electors who identify themselves as Indigenous through the Centrelink data. That went out at the end of May, so we will get outcomes from that at the end of June.

I also know that the AEC will continue to roll out this program to all electors right up to when the referendum will be conducted. Its plan is to continue this into the future.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I thank the Electoral Commissioner, Mr Iain Loganathan, for coming in today and Ms Kelly for being here.

The committee suspended.

OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER AGAINST CORRUPTION

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce your officials and make an opening statement for the Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, then we will go to questions.

Ms FYLES: Joining me is Mr Michael Riches, Independent Commissioner Against Corruption, and Naomi Loudon, Executive Director, Office of the Independent Commissioner Against Corruption. I do not have an opening statement. I will hand to the commissioner.

Mr RICHES: I am joined today by Naomi Loudon, who is the ICAC Executive Director and is the second in charge in my office.

Next month will mark two years since I commenced as the commissioner. It has been an interesting two years. Despite a number of challenges, my office has made a great deal of progress in establishing itself as a capable organisation. I am indebted to my incredibly hardworking and committed team.

In the last 12 months, we have completed numerous investigations, four of which have resulted in investigation reports and two of which have been the subject of public statements. I hope to complete another three investigation reports before the end of this calendar year. Ms Loudon is also presiding over some investigations that are nearing their conclusion.

At the same time, we have assessed more than 300 reports, delivered three general reports to parliament, published a research report, held an online course on conflicts of interest and delivered training locally in Alice Springs, Nhulunbuy and online.

This week, we will publish a further research report and, all going well, we will go live with a new website tomorrow. That new website will allow us to publish weekly statistics with the intention to expand public access to data over time.

In March we commenced a review of the whistleblower frameworks in the Northern Territory. Before the end of the calendar year, I will publish new directions and guidelines governing the way in which protected communications are to be handled in the Northern Territory.

In May this year I hosted commissioners and CEOs from anticorruption agencies around Australia in Alice Springs. The meeting was a great success. With the endorsement of my interstate counterparts, we have commenced working to host the next Australian Public Sector Anti-Corruption Conference in Darwin in 2024. The biannual conference is the largest of its kind in Australia and often draws attendees from the Asia-Pacific.

Last year I travelled to the United States to attend the International Anti-Corruption Conference. It was an excellent opportunity to not only learn from international peers, but also observe some world-renowned experts, some of whom I have spoken to about speaking in Darwin.

This is the first time that the Australian conference will be held outside of the eastern seaboard and will be the first time the conference has been held following the commencement of the National Anti-Corruption Commission. I am very much looking forward to hosting the conference in Darwin in July next year.

We have made great progress in developing a strategic intelligence capability in order to identify trends, issues and themes. I hope that capability will better inform our investigative and prevention and education efforts.

We have achieved a lot, particularly given we have operated with a budget some \$1.4m less than was available in the previous year, and despite some real difficulties in filling vacant positions.

From 1 July this year we will see a further reduction of about half a million dollars. It is inevitable that a reduction in resources will impact upon both the breadth of work that can be accomplished and the speed at which that work can be accomplished. I would like us to progress more efficiently and to look at more matters, but resources is a real consideration. Nevertheless, I thank my incredible team for their efforts.

Finally, as you know, a draft bill to amend the ICAC Act has been published. As a statutory office holder, I take the view that I ought not comment publicly on matters of policy, unless it is a necessary incident of the discharge of my statutory functions or is otherwise a matter of such significance as to warrant a departure from the norm.

On 2 June I made a submission in respect of the exposure bill. For transparency and in an effort to assist to inform the debate, I published my submission on the ICAC website. I also understand that MLAs have received a copy of my submission.

Finally, I submit for tabling a page from the upcoming research report. The table sets out the action taken in respect of allegations received by my office, and the time period for that document is from November 2018, which is when the office commenced, to December 2022. The table is broken down by reference to sector.

Mr CHAIR: The document tabled by the commissioner will be given the number 5.1. We will make copies for the relevant committee members.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask my first couple of questions to the Chief Minister. How can your government justify the continued cuts to the ICAC budget?

Ms FYLES: With respect, there are not continued cuts to the ICAC budget. In the budget papers under statutory officers, there has been an increase in the output appropriation. As discussed in this committee last year, there was a decrease in the funding to the Office of the ICAC. In the 2020 Budget there was temporary funding to support activities as the ICAC was a fairly new institution in the Territory. From my perspective, that outlines the budgetary questions you asked.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We just heard from the ICAC Commissioner that there was \$1.4m less than in the previous year and from 1 July there will be \$500,000 less, which is \$0.5m in cuts. Why is your government cutting \$0.5m out of the ICAC budget?

Ms FYLES: I disagree with the figures you quoted. It can be clearly seen in the budget papers in the output appropriation an allocation of \$5.33m to an increase of \$5.67m.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you disagreeing with the ICAC Commissioner?

Ms FYLES: I am pointing to the budget papers that are presented.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have just heard from the ICAC Commissioner. They are the numbers that we have just been told.

Ms FYLES: As I said, temporary funding was provided in the past. In the 2020 budget there was an increase of \$1.55m in the 2019–20 budget, \$3.6m in each of the 2020–2021 and 2021–22 budgets, \$2.4m in the 2022–23 budget and \$1.9m ongoing in 2023–24. There were machinery-of-government changes, which you would be familiar with. There were the Langoulant report measures.

With respect to the importance of ICAC, if they were investigating a lengthy and complicated matter, as for other agencies, they can apply for a Treasurer's Advance if they need additional allocation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How does a \$0.5m cut to the ICAC budget deliver on greater transparency and scrutiny of your government?

Ms FYLES: I have provided a response to the question.

Mr CHAIR: In relation to the appropriation. Leader of the Opposition, could you clarify the question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How does a \$500,000 cut to the ICAC budget deliver greater transparency and scrutiny of your government?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question.

Mr CHAIR: The minister has answered in relation to there not being a cut as per the outputs. I am happy for you to rephrase the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The ICAC Commissioner just told us that this will impact the resources available for his office, which will impact the work. It means there will be less investigative activity by the Office of the ICAC and less scrutiny and transparency of your government. Is that correct?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Minister stated before that if required, they can, like any agency, come for a Treasurer's Advance during the quarterly budget review. Correct me if I am wrong.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Chief Minister can say that she answered the question if she wants to, but she has not. I am specifically asking about how this will lead to a better outcome of scrutiny and transparency of her government.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, if she says she has answered the question ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She believes she has answered the question.

Mr CHAIR: You have asked the minister, and the minister believes she has answered it. You can ask her a different way and see if you get a different response, but she is saying she has answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In regard to the Shanahan review into the ICAC Act, did your government make that public?

Ms FYLES: The ICAC legislation is a fairly recent establishment in the Northern Territory. When the CLP was in government, it refused to establish an ICAC. We established the process. As you would understand, once any new legislation has been operational for a period, it is timely to review it. That was undertaken. An exposure draft bill was presented because it is quite detailed work. A number of interested parties provided feedback on the legislation. That exposure draft has been out for some time, and we have received further feedback. I note the commissioner has also provided feedback.

In regard to the Shanahan review, I would have to seek advice and update the committee.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You do not need to seek advice because the answer is no; your government has not made the Shanahan review public. Why?

Ms FYLES: From recollection, Greg did the work, and that was outlined in the discussion paper. I do not believe, but I am happy to check, that there was a report as such. You are testing my memory, so I apologise.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you not see how this undermines community confidence in the ultimate outcome of the review? The ICAC must work across all agencies in the Northern Territory, including government and any public official.

The fact your government decided to have a review behind closed doors—not available to the public—into the powers and operations of the ICAC Act has undermined community confidence in your government regarding the powers of the ICAC going forward. This is a deliberate act by your government not to make public something that should be public. Why ...

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I remind you of Standing Order 109 in relation to imputations. Get to the question so that the minister can answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why has your government not made the Shanahan review public? This is a review of legislation relating to scrutiny and transparency.

Ms FYLES: I answered the question.

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister believes she has answered the question, Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sure she does.

Did you provide an advance copy of the exposure draft bill of the ICAC Act to the commissioner in advance of it going on the website?

Ms FYLES: I would have to seek advice on that.

Question on Notice No 5.2

Mr CHAIR: Opposition Leader, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was the ICAC Commissioner provided an advance copy of the exposure draft of the ICAC amendment bill prior to it being published?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Opposition Leader has been allocated the number 5.2.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I might ask the same question of the ICAC Commissioner. Were you provided an advance copy of the exposure draft?

Mr RICHES: I do not think I was provided the final copy of the draft. I took a period of leave, but I do not recall receiving a draft of the final bill. There has been a great deal of communication. I think in the month after I first started in 2021 I made my first submission in respect of the review that was being undertaken.

I have made a number of submissions in writing and provided them to the Chief Minister, to you—Leader of the Opposition—and to the ICAC standing committee, because I always thought it appropriate that I be transparent in that respect.

Ms FYLES: One of the representatives in the Chief Minister and Cabinet has done an enormous amount of work on this. There has been a process at arm's length. The commissioner is in a unique position, because it is legislation that dictates his role. He is an independent statutory officer. When DCMC joins us, I am happy for any questions to be asked.

I made sure that the agency lead have the ability to work freely and to make sure that, even you, Leader of the Opposition, are informed, but it is not something that is seen. In terms of the workings, the final bill is a matter for the government, but they are making sure the feedback has been independent, I believe.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If there has been this close working environment between government and the ICAC on the future of the powers and what the operations of an ICAC look like in the Territory, why has the ICAC Commissioner identified 19 separate clauses of your exposure draft that are problematic?

Ms FYLES: I did not say there has been a close relationship.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But there has been back and forth. You were inferring there had been adequate consultation.

Ms FYLES: I am just saying it has been an enormous body of work. Strong work has been undertaken to ensure all different views. As I said in my closing comment, the final bill will be a matter for government. We certainly have ensured that there has been an independent process of information flow.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will re-ask my question. Why has your government developed an exposure draft that has 19 separate clauses that the ICAC finds problematic or has identified concerns with?

Ms FYLES: I would be very careful with your words. The ICAC as a commissioner who operates under the legislation is putting forward his view.

As a government we brought forward an ICAC bill into the house, something I note the CLP government never did and you were a part of that government.

There is a number of different ways in which ICACs operate and are set up around Australia. We have just heard from the commissioner about attending international conferences and making sure that contemporary models, views and roles are taken into account.

We have legislation that was proudly passed by a Labor government, putting the first ever ICAC in place. Once it is operational, of course, there will be changes that some will agree on and others may not. As the government of the day the Cabinet will decide on the final bill and present it to the House for, I am sure, some furious debate.

In terms of why the steps were taken, an exposure draft bill is always a good way to make sure that all the views through consultation can be articulated and presented in legislation and that people are clear on that. There will be some things we agree on and some things that the government will make a policy decision on. It is important to acknowledge that as a Labor government we established the ICAC, we are reviewing it and we will continue to support it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is it not true that members of your Cabinet have been subject to ICAC investigations? It is well and truly on the public record.

Ms FYLES: I am not sure what that has to do with the output before us.

Mr CHAIR: I would agree. Leader of the Opposition, I remind you of the manner and form of questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of course you would agree. I will restate my question.

It is true that your government and its ministers have been subject to numerous ICAC investigations. Those are on the public record and well documented. Can you see why Territorians are concerned that it is your government who has done a closed door, behind the scenes review of the powers, obligations and operations of the ICAC Act and that it would have been better dealt with by a parliamentary scrutiny committee that is open to the community and bipartisan?

Mr CHAIR: I remind you, Leader of the Opposition, of the manner and form of questions—inference and imputations and also asking for a matter of opinion, which is exactly what your question is. I ask you to rephrase your question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, my question was ...

Mr CHAIR: It is not up for debate, Leader of the Opposition. We are not doing this ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Would you like me to ask it in a different way?

Mr CHAIR: Yes, I would.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask it in a different way just to make you happy.

Do you accept that the community is outraged by the fact that your government, which has on many occasions been investigated by ICAC, has done a behind closed doors review of the ICAC Act without any community consultation?

Ms FYLES: The Territory Labor government did what the CLP failed to do; we established an ICAC to maintain the confidence in our public administration institutions. We need to remember that what this is about is making sure taxpayer dollars, right the way through, are accounted for.

The government upholds the importance of the ICAC to be open, accountable and transparent. The ICAC Commissioner has made his position clear; he wants to get on with the job and do that job well. The government respects the ICAC.

The legislation was introduced and is being reviewed. There are a lot of varying opinions about different matters within the ICAC. We have been transparent and undertaken a review. There has been an enormous amount of work. There was an exposure draft bill. There has been no final determination made. The ICAC Commissioner has shown how transparent he is by providing that submission to every member of the Legislative Assembly. Cabinet, the democratically elected government of the Northern Territory, will make a final decision and present that bill to the House. That will be debated, I am sure, with rigour at that point. I cannot be any more transparent about the steps undertaken for the review of this legislation.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, before you move on, to make the imputation that because a person has been referred to the ICAC, they are not abiding by their office ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am talking about things that are on the public record ...

Mr CHAIR: I understand that, but the manner in which you are asking the question leads to that imputation. I ask that when you ask questions, try to avoid any imputation that you have previously done with your other questions. I am happy with the line of questioning, but you need to steer clear of any imputations from now on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why did you ignore community calls for an open, transparent, bipartisan review of the ICAC Act?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question by outlining the process the government has undertaken and continues to undertake.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why did you decide to do the closed-door Shanahan review instead of a scrutiny committee of the parliament?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ICAC Commissioner, could you please take us through some of your most—in reference to your submission on the exposure draft—serious concerns about what has been presented so far?

Mr RICHES: I would not characterise the matters I have raised as concerns. As I said in my opening statement and my submission, I do not consider it appropriate for a statutory office holder to express views publicly on matters of policy. I do not think it is proper for a person who is given statutory functions and powers to be outgoing in saying what he or she wants.

Having said that, the purpose of the submission is to highlight what I consider to be matters of practical implication that ought to be considered when thinking about the content of the bill. The purpose of my submission, and others submission I have made, is to highlight where some anomalies might arise in the ICAC Act and, importantly, what the consequence of those anomalies would be in our ability to carry out our functions.

The primary issue, and one that should be further considered and debated, is the question of the use of compelled evidence in a public report or statement. Let me briefly explain what I mean.

In recent times, I have conducted an investigation where I relied heavily upon evidence obtained from witnesses during an examination. Those witnesses were required to give evidence. As a consequence of that evidence—together with some other material but in large part because of the evidence that they gave—I made findings that an individual had engaged in corrupt conduct. However, as the act is currently constructed, I am not permitted to put in any public statement the material that was obtained coercively. In other words, I was not permitted to include in the public statement the evidence that I obtained through those examinations.

I took the view that it would be patently unfair on that individual to identify that individual but not be able to set out the evidence that I fundamentally relied upon. It would, in essence, be saying, 'I found that person X is engaged in corrupt conduct. Just trust me.' I do not think that is appropriate.

However, the bill, as currently constructed, creates some challenges in that the way I read the provisions, if they are amended and enacted in the way that they have been. The effect would be that I could not include compelled evidence in a report that I make to parliament, but I could include it in a report made that I publish. That sets up a situation where if I make findings against a minister or an MLA, I cannot include the compelled

evidence, but if it is in respect of someone else, I can. I am not going to express a view; however, one might think that is an odd consequence for what would become a two-tier system.

I have raised those issues with, as the Chief Minister quite rightly said, a team that has been working very hard on the bill. I followed it up in respect of the written submission I have made.

The question of whether compelled evidence ought to be included in any public report is an issue that is universally challenging. It is an issue that is raised in other jurisdictions. It is a particular issue in respect of the potential impact that might be occasioned on future criminal proceedings.

The only point I would make is, to the best of my knowledge, I am the only jurisdiction in the country that has the power to make findings but does not have the power to include that evidence in any public report. If that does not change, my process will not change. I will probably not publish reports because if I cannot publish a fulsome report that has all the evidence in it, I have concerns about publishing a report at all. If I was to make a public statement, it would be of the kind that I have made in the past, which would ensure that a person is not identified on the face of the statement.

A number of other practical considerations arise in respect of the bill, but to me that issue of the use of compelled evidence is the most critical. I express no view as to what the final outcome should be, but I encourage there to be good, solid debate on that question, because it is a very important question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Commissioner, thank you for going through that so that we can all understand it. Sometimes these things can be very technical, but that was very easy to understand and well put.

You mentioned in your opening statement that you had received 300 reports. Is that for the reporting period up to the end of March?

Mr RICHES: No, up to now. I think it is 319. Last financial year it was 330, so we are looking like we will end up with pretty close to the same number.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Of the 319, how many remain—I do not know what you call it—active or open?

Mr RICHES: I do not have that number in front of me. The majority of the reports that have come in have been assessed and a decision made as to what action will be taken. The document that I tabled—there are copies that I provided—sets out at least until the end of 2022 the outcome in respect of each allegation that has been made, whether that be no further action, referral, preliminary inquiry or investigation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Sorry, do you mind going through that three or four again?

Mr RICHES: It was no further action, referral, preliminary inquiry or investigation. Within referral, there are two ways that a matter can be referred. One is referred with a direction or directions in respect of the referral—most commonly that direction includes a requirement to report back on what action has been taken—and a referral without any further direction, so it is left for the referral agency to deal with.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that to the agency in which it ...

Mr RICHES: It could be the agency, the Ombudsman or a federal entity. There is a whole range of different entities to which a referral could be made.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can I take it on notice and ask you to break down the 319 into those four categories of no further action, referral, public inquiry or investigation? I appreciate that you do not have it on you.

Mr RICHES: I can do that. I will be in the annual report. I can tell you if it assists that we currently have 15 ongoing investigations and one ongoing preliminary inquiry. That is what we are doing internally.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have all of the 319 been assessed? Have they all gone somewhere?

Mr RICHES: There are about 40 that are sitting, waiting for a final decision to be made. With the remainder, a decision has been made, whether that be to investigate, refer or take no further action.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Okay.

Mr RICHES: It may or may not interest people, but I did a bit of a comparison with the New South Wales and Victorian anticorruption agencies. We tend to take no further action on fewer reports than other agencies. We refer somewhere in the middle, about the same. We investigate substantially more. Our numbers between 2018 and the end of 2022 show that we commit to an investigation in respect of about 8% of reports made. In New South Wales over a similar period it was 0.8% and in Victoria it was 1.2%. We commence investigations far more frequently.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you able to give a breakdown of the investigations ongoing whether they apply to MLAs or government ministers?

Mr RICHES: I will not comment on the nature of the investigations. The approach I take is to only investigate matters where I think the use of resources and the powers of the ICAC are appropriate. They are matters that I would consider to be particularly sensitive, serious and warranting the use of the ICAC. I am not willing to make statements about who the subject of an investigation is or what the nature of the matters are, other than to say there are 15 and they are all matters that we are working as efficiently as we can to bring to a conclusion.

Mr CHAIR: I remind everyone of Standing Order 210 on the protection of witnesses and the like, noting previous Estimates.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The commissioner handled it just fine.

Mr CHAIR: I am just reminding everyone so that we understand.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Last year there was a lot of talk about the ICAC seeking a Cabinet document in order to form part of an investigation. At that time, government was saying that it was working with the ICAC and that it was likely to be provided et cetera. Was that information provided to the ICAC?

Ms FYLES: We want to make sure that ICAC is properly empowered to do its job. That is why we established it. It is also important that the confidentiality of Cabinet is preserved so that public servants can give free and frank advice and that Cabinet members can have an open conversation. The laws governing the ICACs in Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales all recognise Cabinet privilege in some way.

I would have to take on notice—I am not sure that it is even appropriate—the specific question. We consider each request when it comes to us. At times, we need to have Cabinet privilege. We try to find the balance with ICAC, ensuring that it is empowered to do its job while at the same time, the privilege of Cabinet is upheld.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Commissioner, correct me if I am wrong. I think it was about an investigation relating to potentially misleading Cabinet or something like that. Did you ever receive the documents that you required for that rather public investigation? It was not a public investigation but there was a lot of commentary about it at the time, I recall.

Mr RICHES: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you keep records of the number of occasions you ask for Cabinet documents and are either provided or not provided them?

Mr RICHES: There has been more than one occasion where documents have been provided to the office, often by anonymous individuals. Literally just an envelope turns up in the mail, and upon opening the mail it becomes very clear that the document is either a Cabinet document or could potentially be one. In accordance with the legislation and to ensure that we are operating appropriately, the document is not read. It is placed in a safe and communication is had with the Chief Minister in respect of whether she will permit access to that document. I cannot tell you the number of occasions, but there have been occasions where access has been permitted.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Do you have enough resources to fulfil your statutory obligations?

Mr RICHES: On the question of resources, I am sure most people who sit in this chair will say the same thing; I will do as much as I can with what I have. If I have more, I will do more. If I have less, I will do less. There are matters that come across our desk that we would like to look at, but we do not look at them because we do not have the resources to look at them.

I would love to have more resources, but the question of resources is not just a question of money. Notwithstanding that we have had a number of vacant positions, we have had difficulty filling them in terms of investigative and legal resources.

I do not know what the reason is; I do not know whether it is a reflection of issues within the Northern Territory more generally in respect of skills shortages and challenges in incentivising people to come to the Northern Territory. I know that relative pay is a challenge, especially if we are looking to recruit Northern Territory Police investigators, for example. There is a substantial disparity between what a person earns in police versus what we can pay. I do not know whether the challenges the office has experienced in the past are still creating some legacy issues for us in recruiting people to the office.

They are all issues we are grappling with, and we are trying different approaches to encourage people to work in what is a really good office with incredibly interesting and challenging work. People find that when they come in.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am asking specifically, do you have enough resources to fulfil your statutory obligations? If you do not, that is a very serious matter.

Mr RICHES: My statutory obligations, in effect, give me the discretion as to what I do and what priority I give to things. In turn, the extent to which I am able to discharge my statutory functions is dictated by the fact I am one person and the fact I have finite resources.

I do not think I am unable to discharge any of my statutory functions; however, there is the extent to which I am able to discharge those functions—education, for example. I would love to get out to a number of remote communities and some of the larger communities and have my team spend a great deal more time running education programs. I would love to create more videos of the kind that have been created in the past.

All of that requires people and time. If you do not have many people and your time is being occupied by myriad things, that creates a challenge.

I would love to have another 20 people—I am sure everyone who sits here would say the same thing—but I am a statutory office holder and I will do what I can with what I have.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are telling us that you are not running on full capacity—at 100%—because of budgetary restrictions and difficulty employing people. At what capacity are you functioning?

Mr RICHES: That is a difficult question to answer. I am confident that if I had more staff in our operations, prevention and education areas, we would be accomplishing a lot more a lot faster.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many vacant positions do you have at the moment?

Mr RICHES: Across the board, we have four; two in operations, one in legal and I think one in corporate services. I can take that on notice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Out of how many in total?

Mr RICHES: Four I think.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You have four vacant positions out of how many in total?

Mr RICHES: We have 24.5 FTEs and we had 31.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, could you restate the question because he said there are some vacancies and he would come back to you. He is happy to take the question on notice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You said four, but there could be five?

Mr RICHES: I will need to take the question on notice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: That is fine. It is a general indicator. If your FTEs are 24.5, you are running at a 20% reduction in staffing, below the full complement. Is that about right?

Mr RICHES: Our complement is dictated by our budget. Despite varying views, I have operated on less money than I had when I first started. I will operate on less money in the next financial year. Given that salaries are our biggest cost, the number of staff we can have is influenced by the monetary number. I think 20% is a fair estimate.

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, you mentioned the number and volume of investigations and that resourcing was the key to getting investigators. You are no different from any other department in finding people and structuring your budget.

On average, how many reports would you get that should probably first go to the Ombudsman or an internal review before coming to you? Does that have an impact on your resource because you need to wade through those reports before you find the ones that meet the threshold for you to investigate them?

Mr RICHES: Assessments do take quite a bit of time and it is frustrating when people think that an assessment is a quick look at something. We do not infrequently encounter reports made by individuals who have exercised their rights elsewhere and come to us. Whether that is on a genuine basis that they feel the matter has not been properly dealt with elsewhere or whether it is just going to each and every place that is possible, it takes time.

We will receive reports and hundreds of pages of material with those reports. Sometimes we will receive the material and it is not clear what it is about. One of our staff will have to wade through it to try to work out what is being asserted. That is not an insignificant resource burden.

I would love to have our assessments to the point where we do not have 40 at any one time that have a backlog; I would love to have none. The reality is that not every report comes in beautifully written, clearly articulating the allegations. Often we will receive reports where it is hard to discern.

The other challenge arises when people report anonymously. There may well be information in that report that may raise a serious issue, but because the person has reported anonymously, we cannot go back to that person to get the additional information that is required. I encourage people, even if they want to remain anonymous, to give us a contact such as a Hotmail address or similar so that at least we can contact them if we need further information.

For about 60% of our reports, no further action is taken. One of the higher categories for not taking further action is because it has already been looked at by someone else.

Mr CHAIR: Re-referrals from decisions people were not happy with through their appropriate direct line chain, for example.

Mr RICHES: That is right.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We talked about this last year. How much have you had to allocate from your budget for legal fees to defend matters against the ICAC? How much have you had to pay out in cases where the ICAC has been unsuccessful?

Mr RICHES: In legal fees, they are on the answers I provided to your questions. You will see that there is a reference to Hutton McCarthy in that list. The majority of that relates to legal proceedings. That is not finished yet; there is still one set of proceedings in court. It is set for appeal at the end of this month.

I can take that on notice and provide you a response.

Question on Notice No 5.3

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Please provide a breakdown of the amount of the ICAC's budget that has had to be allocated to legal fees in defending matters of the ICAC and the amount having been paid out for settlements.

Mr RICHES: Do you want that just for this financial year or ...

Mr CHAIR: It will need to be up to 30 March. That is the cut-off you can report on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not the cut-off; it is the usual for the financial year. It is up to you.

Mr RICHES: That is fine; I am happy to do it.

Mr CHAIR: Commissioner, do you accept the question?

Mr RICHES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 5.3.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you for coming in, commissioner.

That concludes the Estimates review of the ICAC. We will take a 10-minute break for morning tea and come back at 10.25 am.

The committee suspended.

OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement for the Office of the Ombudsman.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, Mr Chair. Similar to the other statutory officers, I will not be making a statement. I introduce Peter Shoyer, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner. He wishes to make an opening statement.

Mr SHOYER: I will keep the opening statement brief. We have taken on more functions recently. I note that the office now undertakes four distinct functions:

- the Ombudsman function, which includes oversight of administrative actions across the NT Government and local government as well as police conduct
- the Information Commissioner function, which looks at information access and privacy protection within the NT Public Sector
- the new Judicial Commission office, which provides administrative and investigative support to the independent Judicial Commission
- and a role as interim NT national preventive mechanism under the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

We had a reduction in numbers during the year in terms of the Ombudsman's and the Information Commissioner's office. I am happy to answer questions if people want to go into that detail.

We have continued to work on those approaches. I completed a report into police utilisation of body-worn cameras, which was tabled recently. I am nearing completion of a report into police use of spit hoods and restraint chairs on youths.

We have done a bit of work in the privacy area, continuing a review of domestic violence information-sharing provisions and supporting implementation of data access agreements to facilitate information provision to Territory Families in respect of vulnerable children and their associates.

I will leave it at that for now. I am happy to answer any questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you had any cuts to your budget for this year?

Mr SHOYER: We have had a reduction following two years of funding for OPCAT implementation. There are ongoing discussions between the Commonwealth and the NT about the ongoing funding of OPCAT. That is the major reduction. There are always going and froing of getting additional funding for CPI increases, efficiency dividend and that sort of thing, but that is the main difference in the funding.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will that reduction in OPCAT funding mean that you are not able to conduct inspections of prisons?

Mr SHOYER: Essentially that will have to be sorted out. There are two functions under the legislation that was passed a little while ago, but it is not yet enforced. One of them is OPCAT, and the other is the official visitor program which is being transferred to our office. We will definitely need ongoing funding for both of those. My hope is to be able to carry over a small amount of funding to continue the OPCAT operations that we have going at least for the first half of the new financial year, but there definitely needs to be additional funding for us to continue those functions into the future.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you do not source additional funding, your work under OPCAT will have to cease and you will not be conducting any official visits of prisons?

Mr SHOYER: Essentially, there will be little in terms of the ability to carry out the full OPCAT functioning. If we get carryover, we will be carrying that on for another six months or so. From then on there will be limited opportunity. We will do what we can, but that will be utilising existing resources from the Ombudsman's office.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Was the full Paget report made public?

Mr SHOYER: No. What has happened recently is—for the benefit of people, the Paget report was into an incident that occurred in 2020 at the Darwin Correctional Centre—a part of it was made public. I had urged previously that a significant part of it may be made public subject to any relevant redaction that was necessary. The government, as part of a package of information, has recently released the executive summary and recommendations of the report. The bulk of the report has not been made public. My understanding is that some other elements of the report have been produced as part of an FOI application, but there is still a significant amount that has not been made public.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If you were of the view that you thought a significant part could be made public, is it government stopping you from publishing it?

Mr SHOYER: It is not a matter for me to publish it. I obtained a full copy of the report some time ago to assess whether I thought that there were further steps that need to be taken in relation to the individual matter. I looked at that and considered that there were not necessarily individual steps that needed to be taken. I thought the recommendations were an important part of going forward and that they would assist public debate, but it is not a matter for me to publish further aspects of that. I simply note that there has now been some publication. In the fullness of time it may well be advantageous from a public interest point of view to reduce additional parts of that document.

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, minister ...

Ms FYLES: After this line of questioning, it is a point for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am sorry I have interrupted you two texting each other.

Does any failure to publish the Paget report therefore sit squarely with government? It is wholly and solely a government decision on whether it publishes the Paget report.

Mr SHOYER: It is a matter for government, yes.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Last year we spoke at length about the backlog of Victims of Crime payments. Your annual report shows that there were 1,707 open claims by victims of crime. What is that number today?

Mr SHOYER: I am sorry, I cannot give you a figure today, but I have continued to be in contact with the Attorney-General's department in relation to that. The figure I have as at mid-May this year was 1,715 active applications. That is applications in total.

The backlog, which I have been referring to for a number of years, was pre-2018 matters. They have reduced from 452 at the end of last financial year to 239. There has been a new count in pre-2020 applications. There were 755 of those still open at that time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What does the 755 represent?

Mr SHOYER: The 755 are pre-2020 applications. The department also reported that it had made 471 decisions this year and awarded \$3.8m, compared with 394 decisions last year and \$3.3m up to that mid-May point.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There are significant numbers of victims of crime who are waiting protracted lengths of time to have their claims resolved. We are talking about numbers dating back to 2018. Obviously, even 2020 is a long time ago.

What do you need to be able to move through those more efficiently? Is this purely a resourcing issue at your end?

Mr SHOYER: Those are figures dealt with by the Crime Victims Services Unit; that is not something we do. We are overlooking the continuing backlog. Essentially, I have suggested in the past that what needs to be looked at are improvements in procedure, improvements in the legislative base for deciding those applications and consideration of how government will move forward to stop those matters from arising again.

Our office had only three complaints during the year. A lot of that could be put down to better liaison between the Attorney-General's department and complainants and complainants' representatives. We are not getting large numbers of complaints, but there are still large numbers of matters that have not been finalised.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you made any recommendations to government on what that procedure or legislative framework should look like to make our response to victims more efficient?

Mr SHOYER: It is ultimately a matter for government as to what that policy might look like. I have made various suggestions in representations to reviews over the years. Apart from the need to adopt procedures that will deal with these matters faster, they are really my view as Ombudsman from dealing with complaints. I would not necessarily stress them as being the sole way of approaching things.

I have also been advised that a number of amendments are under consideration for addressing the backlog that are anticipated to be raised in the relatively near future. It is something that has to be addressed from the point of view of the backlog and what will provide the most benefits for victims of crime in the future.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Absolutely.

Recently, there has been a lot in the news about a data breach concerning the medical records of Territorians. The Chief Minister said that she reported that breach to you at that time. Was that formally notified to you or your office?

Mr SHOYER: There is no requirement to notify our office of data breaches in the Northern Territory, but there was certainly notice given at the time. We were given a brief outline. We provided some advice on how the Department of Health might deal with the matter. That included various things such as whether anyone should be notified.

We were not involved in it after that initial approach and our provision of advice. Subsequently to the matter becoming publicly known, we sought additional information and we were provided with additional information about the way it was handled.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: At the time when your office provided advice to the Chief Minister on the breach, did that advice include, at a minimum, to notify the people subject to the breach?

Mr SHOYER: No. All it raised was that it was important for the departments to consider whether they should notify someone. In that regard, there are at least two jurisdictions that have mandatory data breach reporting and that is reporting to not only our office, but also people who might be harmed by a disclosure. The test in both those cases is whether disclosure is likely to result in serious harm.

In this case, the disclosure that was made was not to the public; it was to a number of software developers who are involved in development of the Acacia system. There was no suggestion nor evidence that the information had been disclosed beyond that group. Obviously it should not have happened.

In some cases, there were instances where someone had tried to black out any names or identifying information and it had not quite worked. In others, it did not appear that there had been attempts to block out the information at all. The departments were faced with disclosure to a small group of developers.

In that circumstance, having looked at the material subsequently, even if there was a mandatory data breach system in place in the Territory, there would have been a good basis for the departments to say, 'It is not likely to result in serious harm. We have taken careful steps to control the disclosure. It has been limited to a small number of people and, therefore, there would be no need to report to the people who were named, given the level of angst and concern that they might have if they were not fully informed about the limited nature of the disclosure'.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How can you be sure of that? Data breaches are an international phenomenon. China and Russia are having a field day with countries across the world, breaching their databases. How can we in the Northern Territory—such a tiny jurisdiction—be so confident that data has not gone as far as what you think it has?

Mr SHOYER: There is a number of factors. One is that we already have a situation where all that data is managed by DCDD. That was the case, whether it had been provided to the developers or was simply held as part of the existing system.

There is always a risk. There is no doubt about that, but a number of years have passed since then. There has never been any suggestion that the information has been disclosed beyond the realms of those developers. Although there is a risk in any additional disclosure, it did not take it far beyond the realms of the normal handling of information by DCDD.

Yes, it was a disclosure and it was not authorised. It should have been better controlled initially, but from when it was discovered, it was carefully quarantined and dealt with by the agencies. As far as you can be, I would be confident that it was not used beyond those limits.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many FOI requests have you received for this reporting period?

Mr SHOYER: The Office of the Information Commissioner does not receive FOI requests as such; they are dealt with by individual agencies. At the end of each financial year, we receive a report on the number of applications that have been made by each agency. That will not be ready until publication of the annual report.

We receive complaints about matters. To 31 March we received 14 FOI complaints. To give you some idea, from last year's figures, overall agencies across the Territory received 1,627 new applications. Whether that will go up, which has been the trend over many years, we will not be able to tell for this year until September.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I was not making commentary to you as I did not want to interrupt the Leader of the Opposition's line of questioning. Regarding OPCAT, the committee may wish to ask the Attorney-General questions about the legislation and funding. It is ironic that the Northern Territory enacted that, once the Commonwealth put it in place, and we allowed access to our facilities. The other states did not and the international officials packed their bags and went home. We take that matter seriously when people are held in an institution. I wanted to say that a few moments ago, but I did not want to interrupt the line of questioning.

Mr CHAIR: On behalf of the committee I thank the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner for attending today.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER AND CABINET

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement regarding the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, Mr Chair and Estimates Committee. I have with me Dr Frank Daly, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; Mr Tim McManus, Deputy CEO Digital and Corporate Services; Ms Emma White, Deputy CEO Policy Reforms; Ms Maree De Lacey, Deputy CEO Territory Regional Growth; and Mr Jason Schoolmeester, Major Projects Commissioner.

DCMC provides the highest quality police advice and support to me as the Chief Minister, my ministerial portfolios and my Cabinet colleagues. It plays a critical role in coordinating and leading whole-of-government programs and initiatives.

DCMC is growing and strengthening our urban, regional and remote communities. I will provide a quick update on some of the achievements over the past year.

We have released three regional economic plans for East Arnhem, Big Rivers and the Top End. These plans include the priority areas for each region, including housing, roads, digital connectivity, education and workforce development.

We are also accelerating housing development for the Territory. DCMC has been working with agencies to release the land and build new houses in our regions, particularly Alice Springs, Big Rivers and East Arnhem.

DCMC in the Top End is supporting the redevelopment of State Square and is working with Charles Darwin University to deliver a new education precinct in the Darwin CBD. We are working with the Darwin City Deal. We are also ensuring the delivery of a number of partnerships with the Commonwealth Government.

In Jabiru we are working with the traditional owners, the Commonwealth Government and ERA on the future of the Jabiru township and the continuation of Jabiru as a hub for Kakadu-based tourism and a government service centre.

In Alice Springs we are focused on the establishment of the national Aboriginal art gallery, which will begin construction, as well as the water play area. This is a significant project for Central Australia. There is an enormous amount of work coordinating delivery of services. We had changes this year with the establishment of a Central Australian Regional Controller, and we have been partnering with the Commonwealth Government to ensure we are receiving the services in remote communities.

The Big Rivers Economic Regional Growth Plan was jointly launched by the NT Government and the Big Rivers Regional Economic Growth Committee. I thank them for their work on the strategic goal of a \$3bn economy, 1,000 more jobs and a population of 24,000 by 2030.

In Arnhem Land—although it seems like a long time ago, it was within this financial year—we had the first rocket launch. They have been focused on the transition of that township and the area as we see the closure of the mine.

In the Barkly region—I know the Member for Barkly would be saying ‘what about the Barkly’—DCMC is engaged in a collaborative three-stage project with Barkly Regional Council. We are looking at delivering free wi-fi connectivity to the town camps as well as a number of projects within the Barkly region.

The Chief Minister and Cabinet team with me today is joined by strong leadership within the regions. They work closely with the mayors of each of the regions or regional councils. I am certain there will be a number of questions, so I will hold my comments there in terms of the regions.

Changes within the department—in 2023 the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet assumed responsibility for the secretariat services of the Liquor Commission, which transferred from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. I am sure there will be questions on Alcohol Policy. I was going to take them all under Chief Minister and Cabinet, except the treatment of health services, which would fall in the Health portfolio, but I am in the committee’s hands.

The three-year review is under way and will determine whether the policy objectives of the act remain valid and whether its terms remain appropriate for securing those objectives. The social order response team and the antisocial behaviour coordination unit have been established within the Chief Minister and Cabinet, but from 1 July those functions will be transferred to NT Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

The Major Projects Commissioner, Mr Jason Schoolmeester, is here with me today; I acknowledge his work. Investment Territory is fostering private sector investment opportunities that utilise the Territory’s natural resources, including our abundant sunshine, critical and rare earth minerals, productive agricultural land and our close proximity to markets in the Indo-Pacific region. We are attracting industries that reflect what the Territory’s future economy will look like.

The major projects managed by Investment Territory will realise more than \$25bn in private sector capital investment across the Territory. Through the construction phase there will be close to 8,000 jobs and close to 2,500 in operations.

The exciting projects under way are:

- The Australia-Asia PowerLink, a \$35bn solar project, will deliver a significant amount of renewable energy for the Territory and will be used to power new establishments at Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct.
- Arafura Rare Earths' Nolans project transition to the next phase, which is an exciting project for Central Australia. The processing plant based near Alice Springs will be the first of its kind built in Australia.
- Middle Arm Sustainable Development Precinct is progressing well. This is an exciting project that will see whole-of-project environmental assessments. A number have already been achieved and will continue.
- The Local Jobs Fund continues to play a key role in stimulating new businesses and creating jobs by attracting and supporting businesses to access early capital needed to start up for expansion. It has seen a number of projects choose to come to the Territory because of the Local Jobs Fund. In the last financial year it has created a number of new direct and indirect jobs.
- Defence is a huge part of our economy and it is only expected to grow. As the committee would be aware, the Commonwealth Government recently released the most significant review of the Australian Defence Force since World War II. This review places a significant emphasis on the Northern Territory and northern Australia and will see jobs in the region. Defence NT leads the development of the Territory's Defence industries, veterans and strategic engagement with Canberra and our allies.
- As well in the last financial year, Chief Minister and Cabinet has supported a number of National Cabinet meetings. I am the current Chair of the Council for Australian Federation. We have worked with the Commonwealth to establish the Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller. That has had extensive consultations. I note there were questions from the Member for Araluen last week. I hope to have the opportunity to provide more updates.
- The team at CM&C has finalised and released the Scientific Inquiry into Hydraulic Fracturing Final Implementation Report, with a milestone achievement of 135 recommendations to ensure that we have a considered approach and protect our environment and water.
- We are strengthening government agencies and legislation frameworks to rigorously assess EMPs and deliver strong compliance. The SREBA was a major part of that response.

I acknowledge Ms Kathleen Robinson, who was appointed as the interim CEO from May to October. Following a period of well-deserved leave, Ms Robinson announced earlier this year that she would be retiring from the Northern Territory Public Sector after 40-plus years. I wish her well and thank her for her service to the Territory.

I also acknowledge Ms Vicki O'Halloran AO, who was the Northern Territory's Administrator for more than five years. We welcome His Honour Professor Hon Hugh Heggie as the new Administrator.

I acknowledge and thank you, as Chair, and the committee members and the Leader of the Opposition, in changing my appearance times. I can update the committee that Henry is doing very well. He is still in hospital interstate. I am pleased to be here today to answer the committee's questions.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister, on behalf of all committee members it is great to hear that Henry is doing well. We would obviously make those changes again if we needed to.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Accommodating the changes has been no issue whatsoever. We are very pleased to hear that Henry is doing well.

You mentioned in your opening statement that your department is responsible for crime and antisocial behaviour, but listed no achievements. I can understand why. You are, at the end of the day, responsible for the safety of Territorians and to keep people safe needs to be your number one priority as the leader. How many Territorians have died at the hands of a criminal on your watch for this reporting period?

Ms FYLES: In the opening statement I pointed out that antisocial behaviour functions were shifting to Police, Fire and Emergency Services from 1 July. I am happy if there is a particular question, but I do not believe that there was a question in that statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: They are not changing over until 1 July. You are the Chief Minister; you have run the lead agency. Community safety is the number one issue facing our community. I will ask you again: how many Territorians have died at the hands of a criminal on your watch for this reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I remind you of Standing Order 109—argumentative, inference and imputations. Would you like to reframe the question with a question the minister can answer?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many people have died due to crime while you have been the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: I point back to my opening statement. I was talking about the social order response team and the antisocial behaviour coordination unit, which was established ...

Mr EDGINGTON: It is more serious than antisocial behaviour.

Mr CHAIR: Thanks, Member for Barkly. If I need your contribution, I will ask for it.

Ms FYLES: I was providing an update to the committee that the functions which had been established within Chief Minister and Cabinet to support hardworking frontline workers will be transferred to Police, Fire and Emergency Services. It was in cooperation with police to provide additional resources, and often Chief Minister and Cabinet, as the central agency, will provide support or might try something innovative or new that we are not sure exactly which department it will sit with. That was the work with the social order response teams, but I believe that the question the Leader of the Opposition is asking would be under the Police minister's output.

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, so you are aware, questions up to March 30 in relation to what that department and team did will be before the Estimates.

Leader of the Opposition, one would say that question is argumentative. I ask you to rephrase the question in a different manner that complies with Standing Order 109.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are the Chief Minister. You opened by saying that your department has a critical role in coordinating whole-of-government activities. One would have thought—with the way crime is dominating headlines and the hearts and the minds of our community who just want to be safe—that you and your agency would be leading and coordinating our crime response. The question is simple; it is not argumentative. How many people have died at the hands of a criminal while you have been the Chief Minister?

Mr CHAIR: I have just told you, Leader of the Opposition, that it does not comply with 109 and to rephrase it. I will determine whether it is argumentative or not, and I made that ruling. If you re-ask that question again, I will do you for tedious repetition. I have given you the chance to ask the question on antisocial behaviour, but you need to reframe the question in accordance with Standing Order 109.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many Territorians have been killed from knife crime over the last 12 months?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question under the Police outputs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The reason I ask you is that you put out a press release under your own heading—so it is Chief Minister, not Police—called, 'Stamping out knife crime'. You told our community after Declan Laverty died that you wanted to stamp out knife crime before it had taken hold. How many people have been killed from knife crime in this reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister said it is the output for the Police minister.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Chief Minister, do you believe that you have successfully stamped out knife crime, or do you believe it has taken hold?

Ms FYLES: That is asking for an opinion, Mr Chair.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you achieved your target of stamping out knife crime?

Ms FYLES: I understand that the Leader of the Opposition only likes to talk the Territory down and talk about crime, but these are questions that would be under the output of the Minister for Police. I believe there was the opportunity of many hours of questioning the other day for these questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: With respect, these are not questions for Police. I am holding a press release dated 28 March put out under your name and your title, Chief Minister. Your first priority must be to keep the citizens of the Northern Territory safe. Crime is an all pervasive issue. Nothing else can happen while people feel this sense of disempowerment, fear, anger and frustration at the fact that our streets are not safe, people go to bed wondering whether they are next and people are bringing their children into their own bedrooms because they cannot sleep well at night. It is you who said that you would stamp out knife crime and that you wanted to do that before it had taken hold. There has been much knife crime, and far too many people lost their lives this year. Have you achieved your target at stamping out knife crime before it has taken hold?

Ms FYLES: We take community safety seriously. Crime and antisocial behaviour are unacceptable. We do a huge amount of work. Dealing with crime and the sources of crime need to be addressed at the same time as preventing crime. I believe that the Leader of the Opposition's line of questioning is for the Police portfolio. She had the acting commissioner and the Police minister here last week. I cannot help it if she did not answer the questions. I have, from my perspective, made sure that there are more police on the beat than ever before. There are more consequences for crime than ever before and more investment in the things that help prevent crime, and we will continue as a government to do that work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is your policy. These are your words Territorians are waiting for you to act on. Can you confirm that knife crime has increased since you put out your press release saying, 'Stamping out knife crime'?

Mr CHAIR: Just to go back to what the Police minister said—you can confirm those on the transcript—the statistics relate to the Attorney-General and Justice as well. The Chief Minister has rightly pointed out that the Police minister was here before. If it needs to be raised on notice or in writing with the Attorney-General or the Police minister, please do so. In terms of the numbers, the Chief Minister has made it clear that she cannot answer those, and that it is a question for the two other ministers. In terms of policy, I am more than happy to go down that line of questioning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is about policy.

Mr CHAIR: You are asking for details in relation to statistics that the Chief Minister has ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking for the details of statistics; I am asking whether knife crime has increased since the government promised to stamp it out. Does the Chief Minister not know whether knife crime has increased? Is that what you are saying?

Mr CHAIR: I have just made it clear that the Chief Minister has deferred. You could have spoken to the Police minister last week, and you can talk to the Attorney-General, as they deal with our crime statistics. The Chief Minister has made it clear that the question can be answered by those ministers. I am happy for you ask questions on policy up to 30 March, but that resides with different ministers.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Has your policy to stamp out knife crime been successful?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question in the sense that the Leader of the Opposition had the Police minister and the acting commissioner last week. She has the Attorney-General here tomorrow, who is responsible for the crime statistics. I have spoken to the policy work we are doing as a government. I know she does not like the answer, but I have given the Opposition Leader the opportunity—she has heard from me and has the opportunity to ask for the specific figure with those two ministers.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are the Chief Minister. You should be available to answer questions across government. Because you do not like the question, that does not mean you can refuse to answer it. Territorians are listening to this closely. Last week we had, 'Minimise, deny, deny, deny'. Today we have, 'I am not answering the question'. It is not good enough.

Mr CHAIR: Do you have a question related to the line of questioning?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, I do not.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How is it you are happy to put out a press release claiming credit for dealing with knife crime but are not happy to report on how that policy work is going?

Mr CHAIR: Would you like to table that, so everyone on the committee knows the date we are talking about?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The date was 28 March. Everyone in the entire public sector got it. It was printed in the newspaper over several days. It has my notes on it. Would you like me to read the whole thing out? I can.

Mr CHAIR: I am just going through the process. If you refer to it consistently, table it, as is the process for any documentation. I do not need argumentative responses from you, Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is the single biggest, most important policy area that needs to be dealt with by government. You rolled it out just two days after Declan Laverty was killed in his place of work. It is something you pointed to as being a moment in time that would change the course of crime going forward. Many people have lost their life to knife crime since then, and the instances of knife crime are out of control. We even heard from the Education minister that there is knife crime in schools.

Are you telling me you cannot answer a simple question on whether you believe your policy area is actually stamping out knife crime, or whether knife crime has taken hold?

Ms FYLES: The Leader of the Opposition focuses on one issue. This is a huge budget, and Chief Minister and Cabinet delivers services across the Northern Territory. We have invested heavily in police, giving them more CCTV, upgrading their IT systems, building police stations and giving them more tools than ever before. Budget 2023 invests \$1.1bn in public order and safety and a record \$721m in social protection to deliver a range of initiatives to build a safer, fairer and more resilient community.

The Leader of the Opposition asked a specific question, which I have referred her to ask of the Attorney-General. Last week she had the opportunity with the Police minister. I will talk on the budget papers; maybe the Leader of the Opposition did not get the opportunity to read the fact sheets that were provided.

In regard to investing in frontline public safety resources and infrastructure, Budget 2023 supports frontline staff by providing more resources, including a record Police budget and better facilities. There is \$19m to construct a police complex in Peppimenarti, \$8.1m in addition to the \$3.4m ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you reading from the budget fact sheet?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister would like to continue her statement.

Ms FYLES: I am not able to answer the question because she will not let me ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But you are not answering my question. You are reading from a fact sheet from the budget papers.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, you were just reading from a media press statement before. People are allowed to refer to documents.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is right. It was a media statement from the Chief Minister that says, 'Stamping out knife crime'.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, when I am talking as the Chair, you will listen, as you get your chance to talk when you ask a question.

Everyone is allowed to refer to documentation. If they choose to table it for the record, they will do so. I will probably turn around and ask the Chief Minister if she would like to, but I bet the response will be exactly the same as yours; it is a public document.

The Chief Minister is answering your questions and you will get a supplementary follow-on question.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, Mr Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to answer the question.

There is \$3.4m committed under the Barkly Regional Deal to construct a new police watch house in Tennant Creek. There is \$13.7m for repairs and maintenance to improve Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services facilities across the Territory. There is \$5m ongoing to recruit additional firefighters and implement a relief roster, as well as other additional funds to the air wing and, significantly, to support the wellbeing of Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

We are also making sure that we are investing in tackling antisocial behaviour, including \$7.7m to coordinate and deliver services around Darwin and Palmerston, including private security patrols, additional transit safety officers and security personnel on selected bus routes.

Many of the issues that we face in our community are linked to antisocial behaviour and alcohol is a factor. I look forward to questions from the Leader of the Opposition on the three-year liquor review. We need to be agile in responding. We need to not only rely on police, who are incredibly hardworking and who have been well supported by this Territory Labor government, but also be innovative in the ways in which we deliver support to our community.

We have seen that through changes recently to transit safety officers, using security personnel as a tool to support our community and the \$4.8m to support the Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller, which is part of the joint Commonwealth and Territory effort to address the crime and antisocial behaviour occurring in Alice Springs and Central Australia. That will play a key role in the management of the Commonwealth's investment into Central Australia to improve community safety, tackle alcohol-related harm and provide more opportunities for young people.

Sadly, domestic, family and sexual violence is a huge problem for our community. We continue our commitment to deliver generational change and safer communities, particularly for women and children, by investing additional money—\$20m over two years—to domestic, family and sexual violence services.

The additional investment ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How long will you just read from the budget books? This is Budget Estimates where we ask questions. I have read the fact sheet. Anyone listening can read the fact sheet. It is on the website. It has been distributed far and wide. I appreciate that you do not have your own answers, so you have to read something that a Treasury official wrote. Now is not the time to listen to your own voice. I am asking you serious questions about the safety of our community. You are the Chief Minister. This is the Chief Minister's department. Do you really think it meets community expectation to sit there and read from a fact sheet?

Ms FYLES: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You do. You think this meets community expectation of the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: Can I continue, Mr Chair? This is important information to update the committee because the committee is looking at the budget.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We have read it.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, let us continue with the Chief Minister responding to your question unless you have a supplementary right now that you would like to ask in response to the Chief Minister.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Make no mistake, she is not answering my question.

Mr CHAIR: We will give the Chief Minister a chance to come to the end of the answer to the question and then you can go.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many minutes is she allowed to just read from the budget papers?

Mr CHAIR: I will continue to indulge both of you and let the Chief Minister answer the question. If it goes on for too long and we find it to be time-wasting, I will declare that as well. At the moment she is answering your question.

Ms FYLES: It highlights the Leader of the Opposition's lack of understanding of these issues. They are complex and based on a number of issues. There is no single solution nor a single response. That is why, as a government, we are delivering.

As well as building upon resources and support to domestic, family and sexual violence services, we are committed to improving justice outcomes for Aboriginal Territorians, noting the high number of Indigenous Territorians incarcerated. This budget has strong support to resource Correctional Services. It also provides support to address those demand pressures, including the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid, Local Court and the Parole Board.

Youth detention is one part of it. The CLP will simply put youths back into the adult prison, which will not work on the recommendations from the royal commission and give us a safer community.

Alcohol is a huge part of it. We have some of the strongest alcohol regulations, including a Banned Drinker Register, risk-based licensing and a minimum floor price.

Under my leadership, we have established the Alcohol Policy Coordination Unit in Chief Minister and Cabinet for centralised coordination of alcohol policy initiatives across government. This unit is—I touched upon this in my opening statement—reporting and monitoring key alcohol-related harm statistics. We have a draft Northern Territory alcohol action plan; are undertaking a three-year review of the *Liquor Act*; and are working through the risk-based licensing, making sure we have a strong licensing regime that supports our community.

The social order response teams are in Alice Springs and the northern suburbs of Darwin. It is made up of government agencies, council and NGOs that work closely with community to identify where improvements can be made. We know that risky behaviour can at times lead to criminal behaviour.

We are also addressing the causes of the issues in the long term, improving housing in the bush ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you understand that the community wants members of parliament to challenge you; hold you to account; and ask questions about your policies, performance, plans and budget allocation? By reading from a fact sheet, you are depriving the community of the answers they so desperately need. I need to be clear that you understand that you are depriving Territorians of answers and questions that they want asked and answered by you.

Ms FYLES: I know you need to get your grabs for the news tonight, but all these things go directly to crime. We know that risky behaviour ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking you about crime in general as some sort of nebulous concept. This is about stamping out knife crime. You are happy to put out a press release and claim credit on this but are absolved of any responsibility to give an update to the community on how that policy process is going, whether it has been effective or whether there has been any measurable success or failure of that program.

Ms FYLES: All these things go directly to crime. It shows a complete lack of understanding from the Leader of the Opposition. There is not one single solution or one measure we put in place. There has to be extensive supports for vulnerable people, the social order response teams and addressing the underlying issues for the longer term. This includes improving housing; better access to services in remote communities, which we have particularly focused on in Central Australia over the past six months; local decision-making, empowering local communities to decide how they want to live and what services are delivered; and developing our regions and economy, creating local jobs.

Crime and antisocial behaviour is incredibly complex. The Leader of the Opposition is picking up on one aspect in her questioning, but she does not like to hear the answers. There is no single solution, and our government will continue to work as hard as we can and provide the resources to the police or other agencies to tackle these issues.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Since your announcement on 28 March to stamp out knife crime, have you stamped out knife crime?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I have provided a detailed response, and the Leader of the Opposition did not like that. She kept interrupting ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You do not even have enough humility to say you are working on it. You pretend that I have not asked that question and that somehow by reading three or four pages of a budget fact sheet, you have answered that question. This is what the community is talking about and what is impacting people's lives. They are changing their decisions about when they go to the shop and whether they will they bring the kids with them. This is having a profound impact on their lives.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I understand this is an issue in the community and people want answers. I agree that you get the line of questioning on that. The Chief Minister has made it clear that she has answered your question. Do you have any other questions, rather than ask the same one where you will get the same response?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Am I being stopped from asking questions about knife crime?

Mr CHAIR: No. You are not being stopped, Leader of the Opposition. I said the minister has answered your question. Unless you change the way you ask the question, I do not think the answer will change.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you think your answers today meet the community's expectations on answering my questions on knife crime?

Ms FYLES: That is asking for an opinion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: My goodness, this is unbelievable.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, Standing Order 109.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: People have been killed on the street. We just had a man stabbed to death in Alice Springs—how long ago, Member for Araluen, not even two weeks ago?

Mrs LAMBLEY: It was 10 days ago.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: A woman was killed on the steps of a hotel, and there was Declan. There are numerous horrific, tragic and terrifying examples. It is having a profound impact on our emergency services and their response to these highly traumatic incidents of violent crime. It is having a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of our entire community, who are afraid to go to sleep at night. You dignify that high level of concern across our community with pathetic political answers in the hope that I just move on. Do you think I should move on from asking you questions about whether you have been able to stamp out knife crime? Do you think I should just move on? Or will you not answer me? Look at me. Look me in the face and answer that question.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, your conduct is becoming disorderly. I have given you the opportunity to ask whatever question you like in a different manner related to crime because I understand that is a key issue you are concerned with and rightfully so. The Chief Minister has responded in relation to knife crime. If you have other questions on crime, now is your opportunity to ask those. The Chief Minister has responded to that particular question.

What I will not have you doing is yelling across the floor at the Chief Minister, asking for an opinion and being disorderly.

Do you have any further questions, Leader of the Opposition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The community feel you are totally out of touch with their concerns around crime. The next episode I will talk about will highlight for people listening just how out of touch you are.

The international student, Sifat, was tragically bludgeoned to death. That sent shockwaves throughout our community, the country and across the world. In response to that death, at 9 pm on the day he was attacked, you posted on your social media a condolence message along with the song, *Happy Little Things*, with the lyrics, *'Don't forget the little things in life that make you happy'* by Holly Kluge—of course that was later deleted.

Chief Minister, why did you think it was appropriate to post that song in response to Sifat's death?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I go back to my ruling from last week that when we are referring to things like this, we need to be able to substantiate it. I am not saying that it did not happen. I believe what you are saying, but it is about being able to show people to put it on the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I can play it right now, if you want to hear it.

Mr CHAIR: I do not need to hear the song. I am referring to the post you mentioned. I am asking you where you best can, substantiate the pieces that we are putting on the record. The ruling I made last week was asking you to do that where you can.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: All I can do is play it for you. At 9 pm on the night of the day we learned of Sifat's death, the Chief Minister posted to social media. They are the words of the song *Happy Little Things*.

Mr CHAIR: For clarity, is that on the post?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Ms FYLES: I would have to seek further advice on that. Does the Leader of the Opposition have someone assist her with social media? They have been in here this morning snapping photos. I am sure it is already posted.

I have a team that helps me. I will just take that question on notice.

Mr CHAIR: Are you happy to take that on notice, Leader of the Opposition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Chief Minister wants to take on notice why it was appropriate?

Mr CHAIR: She is saying that she is not aware of the post with the comment I asked you to substantiate. Unless you have it there, we can table it. That way it is on the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. I can table it.

Mr CHAIR: I am making sure the record is as accurate as we can because the Chief Minister does not ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How would you like me to do that?

Mr CHAIR: Do you have a screenshot we can table?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you. The Leader of the Opposition tabled a document. It is given the number 5.2.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Territorians continuously hear from you. You say it on radio, in parliament and in the media; I am sure you say to their faces that you cannot answer any questions because matters are before the court. This is despite the fact you are regularly and routinely asked many questions not specific to proceedings before the court.

Have you received formal advice from the Solicitor-General that has advised you never to answer questions on any crime, crimes or crime in general across the Northern Territory?

Ms FYLES: I am surprised at the question. She is reading from a bunch of questions that have clearly been prepared for her. Anyone in the role I have as Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and as a minister of the Crown would never make commentary that would prevent a victim from getting justice because I have inadvertently made a comment. You have made comments about individuals. I would love to provide commentary, but as Chief Minister I have to respect the processes we have. I would expect better from you, as a lawyer, to understand that any commentary, no matter how simple, could affect a court case and impact a victim.

Every incident in the Northern Territory impacts me. I acknowledge all of those, but I cannot place individual commentary. The first rule is not to prejudice any case that may go before the courts.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you ever sought advice from the Solicitor-General on what does and does not constitute prejudicing a case before the court?

Ms FYLES: In the role of minister—I understand the Leader of the Opposition was a minister for only a week—we are routinely given briefs by the people sitting here today at the table, in the rooms at the back and in departments across the Northern Territory. They provide us with advice, but the number one rule is never impact a court case and prejudice it. I do not need advice from the Solicitor-General; it is common sense. I cannot believe the question, from a lawyer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think it is incredibly important we get that on the record. Have you ever received formal advice from the Solicitor-General on what does and does not constitute prejudicing legal proceedings?

Ms FYLES: I just answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, you did not. You said you receive a lot of advice and that you may or may not have. Do you need to take it on notice?

Mr CHAIR: I believe you will find on *Hansard* that she answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, she said she gets advice from a range of people all the time. She has had a range of advice from the Solicitor-General. This is a very important question.

Have you received formal advice from the Solicitor-General on what does and does not constitute prejudicing a case before the court? If you have not, it highlights that your response is purely a political one to avoid answering questions.

Ms FYLES: I answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you received advice from any staff whatsoever on what does and does not constitute prejudicing legal proceedings?

Ms FYLES: As I answered, I get advice from the Solicitor-General, the Solicitor for the NT and departments, but the number one thing I will not do is provide commentary that may prejudice a matter that will go before the court to give victims justice.

I know the Leader of the Opposition likes to play politics with crime and people's stories. What she is doing today is grandstanding. As Chief Minister, I am expected to and will uphold the expectation of not providing commentary that may prejudice cases.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But how do you know whether you are prejudicing a case if you have never been given proper advice on what does or does not constitute prejudicing a case?

Ms FYLES: As I said in my first response, I am repeatedly given advice that warns against making any comments that would prejudice investigations or cases. I said that a couple of questions ago; I do not know how many times I can keep saying it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask you a different question.

Ms FYLES: I would expect you, as a lawyer, or anyone to understand that.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is why I am asking you, because I do. It is very clear that you do not.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Minister has answered your question. You said you had another question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you explain, in your view, what 'prejudicing legal proceedings' means?

Ms FYLES: This is a question of opinion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: There must be some very strong guidelines that you run your coms through that allow you to have this lens, this clear focus, on what does and does not constitute prejudicing the outcome of a case.

Mr CHAIR: We will bring this back to the budget up to 30 March and policy. The Chief Minister has answered the question and she said that to you.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will give you an example. On Thursday, 23 March 2023 in parliament you were asked a question by the Member for Braitling:

The CLP does not believe that a violent offender should have a presumption in favour of bail.

Note that no case was referred to in that first sentence; it was a statement of belief. The question went on:

Is it acceptable to you, as the Chief Minister, that a violent offender has a presumption in favour of bail? Why will you not strengthen bail laws today?

This question does not mention any case or crime—no instance of offending—it is simply a question about bail laws and whether violent offenders should have a presumption in favour of bail. Your answer was:

Mr Speaker, that question goes to the case before the courts, and I will not respond.

Can you please explain how you would be prejudicing the outcome of a court case by answering whether you believe violent offenders should have a presumption in favour of bail?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, does the Leader of the Opposition have a question on the Chief Minister and Cabinet budget, which is what we are here to discuss?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: This is policy. I just asked you a question.

Ms FYLES: She is going to questions that were asked in Question Time. I am not sure how this ties into the budget that is investing in Territorians and services across the Northern Territory. I do not believe the question is relevant to the statement I gave. I know you have been giving her latitude, but I do not believe it is about Budget 2023–24 and the investment in Territorians.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you not think it is important for Territorians to understand why you used a certain phrase to avoid answering any questions in the media or parliament? You do not think Territorians deserve to understand the basis for the continual words they hear from you, which are, 'I cannot comment because the case is before the courts'. Do you not think Territorians deserve any justification for the use of that phrase that you use often across all platforms?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, hold it for a second. The minister has answered your question about prejudicing a case before the courts. I could be wrong, but the question you referred to in *Hansard* would have been about the tragic death of Declan—correct me if I am wrong—and, therefore, the imputation at the time would be that she would be talking about that.

You need to bring this back to the budget and the policy in relation to the budget. We are going off topic a little. I understand that crime is a key concern of many Territorians and they want those questions asked of the government. I ask you to bring that back to the budget, the agency and the opening statement. Let us not continue tedious repetition on the same question to get the same outcome.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is an incredibly important point that Territorians understand that the Chief Minister has no basis to make those comments. That has been made clear today ...

Mr CHAIR: That is not what the Chief Minister said, Leader of the Opposition. It is on *Hansard* what she ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The friends and family of Declan Laverty, of course, continue to grieve, along with our community, this senseless and avoidable loss of life.

Recently, I asked you about comments that Declan's mother, Samara Laverty, had made. She said:

I watched the Chief Ministers response to the concerns and questions asked about crime. I cried. She literally made a jest out of the crime that murdered my son.

Have you been in contact with Declan's mother? Are you working with her to implement Declan's law?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I draw your attention back to the opening statement. This was not raised in the opening statement. I am sure you will get the opportunity throughout the outputs to ask these questions. Obviously Declan's death is a tragedy. Rightfully, the mother has questions she would like answered.

I draw you back to the opening statement so that we can progress through to the outputs where these questions better sit in policy.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have asked the question of the Chief Minister ...

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, it is not open to negotiation.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ... will not answer, does she really want me to only ask it when we get to Output 1?

Mr CHAIR: Do you mean the first output? Probably. I suspect that is where it aligns.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not talking to you, though. You are the Chair. Chief Minister, would you prefer me to ask you that question in Output 11.1?

Mr CHAIR: I am the Chair. Leader of the Opposition, your behaviour is disorderly. You are now on a warning. I will not go through this again. We do this every time you come in. You grandstand and throw it at the Chair. The deal is that you ask a question, the minister responds and I preside over that as the Chair.

I give you the opportunity to ask questions on the opening statement. That does not relate to the opening statement; it better fits in Output 1. Do you have any questions to the opening statement?

Mrs LAMBLEY: Mr Chair, I do not think that ...

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, you will get the point of order in a second. I am asking the Leader of the Opposition to stick to the opening statement.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am happy to deal with the point of order first.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think the Opposition Leader is grandstanding. She is trying to ask the Chief Minister legitimate questions. All I am hearing is that you are trying to shut her down.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, as I just said to the Leader of the Opposition, I am the Chair and ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: Will you warn me too and throw me out?

Mr CHAIR: No, I will not warn you. Why would I do that? Is that what you want, Member for Araluen?

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, I do not. I want the Chief Minister to answer the questions.

Mr CHAIR: She will answer your questions if you ask them related to the opening statement and when we get to the outputs. Are there any questions related to the opening statement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet working to implement Declan's law?

Ms FYLES: We have acted with legislation in the House, as members of this committee are well aware, and we will continue to review. As I have said publicly, I anticipate that a number of elements are being undertaken and will publicly speak on that in the coming weeks. I am hoping to present any further legislative changes that will be needed in the July sittings.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that specifically Declan's law?

Ms FYLES: It is very difficult when an individual is singled out. We acknowledge the pain for Declan's family and his friends, and I have spoken to both of Declan's parents. In terms of taking legislation and policy changes forward, we do that for all Territorians. Absolutely Declan's legacy will continue to live on, and we consider his family and friends. There are many other Territorians who tragically each year—not just this year but every year since self-government, since this parliament has been in place—pass away and we try to work as a legislature to have better policies and better legislation to protect them. It might be that they are a victim of crime. It might be that they are a victim of a workplace disaster. I urge the Leader of the Opposition to be very careful with her line of questioning because she is known as the one-trick pony on crime. Every Territorian's life matters.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You can sit here and be as emotional as you like. The buck stops with you as the Chief Minister. Emotions are valid, but action is what people want and that is why I am asking these questions. I know you do not like it and it is not a focus of yours. That is not going to stop me from asking the questions important to the community.

On 22 March 2023 you announced a seven-point plan that was an immediate review of bail laws. As part of that plan you said you would send WorkSafe to audit late-night retail outlets. How many WorkSafe audits have been conducted?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for the Attorney-General who has responsibility for WorkSafe, and he will be at the hearings tomorrow.

Mr CHAIR: It fits in the portfolios of the Attorney-General.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is interesting because it came out under your name. Are you not keeping track of how your seven-point plan is going?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I am not sure whether she wants me to comment on her opinion and her imputation, but I take these matters seriously. We are not talking about it and we are not just grandstanding; we are getting on with the job. It is my focus each and every day. She asked a specific ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Clearly, you are not getting on with the job. You just told me that the Attorney-General is.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, let the minister finish.

Ms FYLES: She asked a specific question that falls within the minister's purview and I am sure he will be well prepared tomorrow.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, before you go on, it is completely valid to defer to the actual minister responsible for that portfolio. If that was not the case, you would have asked every other minister from day one every question you had. The minister responsible is the Attorney-General and you should ask that question of the Attorney-General.

Mr CHAIR: I do not accept your commentary, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIR: You do not have to, Leader of the Opposition, that is why I am the Chair.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many new crowd controllers are in place at bottle shops since your announcement?

Ms FYLES: We have worked very hard with industry. Some industries are at a higher risk, not just bottle shops but also late-night venues and places that trade into the evening. People may be intoxicated when they visit those locations. It is legal for people to have a drink, but there are behaviours that can come with alcohol-related incidents.

We have worked hard with industry to provide supports. The idea behind providing support to the late-night venues was they would have time to develop the infrastructure changes that might make their venues safer. We have received a number of applications for late-night venues. I was provided with a brief on this before I took leave. I will take it on notice and get the specifics, but we worked really hard with industry. We have received a number of applications and we anticipate that will make a substantial payment to those businesses.

I have also provided to the committee the rationale behind why we stepped in with those late-night crowd controllers. It was around venues of a higher risk, but something in the sense of allowing them to then put in place the infrastructure measures that might make them safer.

Mr CHAIR: Do you want that question on notice, Leader of the Opposition?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes. Before I take it on notice I will add to my question.

Ms FYLES: I had not quite finished my response, but that is okay; you can cut me off.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Actually, Mr Chair cut you off. That is embarrassing.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, that is how it works so that we do not progress too far down the path and we get the question that was asked on the record. Chief Minister, did you want to add more before we put it on the record?

Ms FYLES: That would be appreciated. I get heckled that I do not know an answer, but when I provide a response, she does not like it, and when I try to say it, she cuts me off!

For late-night venues, we want to work on security through environmental design principles so that we can make patrons and staff safe in those locations. That takes time. We need to get audits and measures in place. A considerable amount, I think \$30m, has been provided or is anticipated to be provided. We have received the applications and work closely with industry.

This is something the Leader of the Opposition does not get: you can actually work with people. You do not have to agree on everything, but you can work with people constructively, and this is an example of that.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, did you want to put your question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, but I just want to ask—in case the question on notice needs to be amended—about the funding for crowd controllers, which stops at the end of this month. If the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet is still reviewing applications, it is pretty futile. I want to know whether the applications being processed up until the end of this month will be retrospectively paid.

Ms FYLES: I do not like the implication that the department is reviewing them and it is somehow the department's fault. We have told industry what we will do; it employed these people immediately so that we could have immediate action. You are the first one to go on about immediate actions.

The applications have been received and will be paid out. The program was designed until 30 June. We are working with industry on the steps forward and will consider that over the coming days. We honour the commitment we made and will deliver on that.

Question on Notice No 5.4

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How many new crowd controllers are in place at bottle shops since the announcement on 22 March?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Leader of the Opposition has been allocated the number 5.4.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You just mentioned 'immediate', and this press release I am holding says 'immediate review of bail laws', so please define 'immediate' to your government.

Ms FYLES: We immediately looked at the bail laws, which was done with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice as well as police. We made changes in the parliamentary sittings. That work is continuing. As soon as a change is identified, we are prepared to jump on it. We have shown we will do that. As I said in the opening statement, that work continues.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You announced an immediate review of bail laws on 22 March. It has now been 90 days. Is 90 days immediate for your government?

Ms FYLES: We immediately, within days, made legislative change.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But you did not say immediate legislative change; you said the review would be immediate. Is 90 days and counting immediate for your government?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure whether you blocked out the March parliamentary sittings, but we passed legislation in March.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is the bail review complete?

Ms FYLES: As I said a few questions ago, the bail review looking at bail and offences has been continuing with the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice. As changes are required, they are brought to us, and we will present the final review in the coming weeks.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are expecting the final review in August. It is at 90 days now. Will that report be an immediate one? It is ludicrous. On 22 March you said you would immediately review bail. We are up to 90 days now. How can several months be immediate to your government?

Ms FYLES: In March we made legislative change. That review work is being undertaken; any changes that are needed are brought to us and we will act upon them. To provide a conclusion to that there will be the finalisation of that report.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Changes are provided to you, ongoing, over the course of several months?

Ms FYLES: I have been regularly briefed on that work and where things are at. Any changes needed are acted upon, which is why you saw legislative change in March. I have not been provided with any other actions in the meantime, but I anticipate there will be more over the next few weeks as we conclude that work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In 90 days, your immediate review of bail has not put forward any other legislative changes that would support stronger bail?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, I believe she has answered that question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, she just said that in her answer, so I am asking about that new information.

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question and given the same answer three times.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, you have not. I asked you about 'immediate' and you said, 'other than the bail reform we did in March, no other changes have been presented to me. I am regularly briefed. If we are briefed with something that needs to be done, we would do that'. You then said that you have not received any other changes since March. Your immediate bail review has not put to you any other recommendations for legislative change; is that correct?

Ms FYLES: For someone who claims I did not give her an answer, she reiterated my answer. I believe I have answered the question, Mr Chair.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a new question. This is how it works. You say something, I ask a question, then you reply.

Mr CHAIR: Well done, Leader of the Opposition, I will give you that. Standing Order 109; to be fair, she answered your question, do you have a new question?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You answered that you received no others; that is interesting. What is the point of the report in August, which people are eagerly awaiting? What are you expecting to be in it—nothing?

Ms FYLES: I allow our government departments to do the thorough work. Police and Attorney-General are the main departments and they are working incredibly hard to look at what we can do to keep Territorians safer. We have already made one change. They are doing that thorough work and I have been kept informed. As changes are needed, I am prepared to act.

I cannot anticipate what that report will say as it concludes, but I have been kept abreast of it and acted along the way. I anticipate in the next couple of weeks we will have the final report.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that final report in the next couple of weeks or at the end of August, as you said on the radio two weeks ago?

Ms FYLES: The Leader of the Opposition would not understand but there are processes. As quickly as we can, we will present this work to the community. I have confidence in the police and the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice, which are leading this work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You expect to receive the report in two or three weeks, but you will not let anyone know about it until the end of August. Is that correct?

Ms FYLES: You are making inferences. I have been clear ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am putting your words back at you. On radio you said it would be the end of August and now you have said it would be a couple of weeks. You said there were processes I do not understand. Please enlighten me. What is the difference between you getting a report in a couple of weeks and your comments that it would not be done until the end of August?

Ms FYLES: There is a sense of urgency from our government departments on this. As soon as we get that information we will share that with the community.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you define 'urgency' differently from 'immediate'?

Mr CHAIR: That is an expression of opinion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I thought it might be a defined term by this government because it often uses it with a different meaning from the general meaning of the word found in the dictionary.

Mr CHAIR: That is an expression of opinion. Standing Order 109; please ask your questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It was interesting on radio last week, your Deputy Chief Minister alluded to the fact that the list of weapons that your government limited bail reform to—being only the prescribed and controlled weapons—were likely not adequate. She said there would need to be an expansion of the types of weapons where people start with the position of no bail. The CLP has tried to bring that reform into parliament three times. Has this information been provided to you as part of your many updates on the bail review?

Ms FYLES: I have not had that specific information provided to me. The Leader of the Opposition knows quite well that there is a lot of commentary about the categorisation of weapons. It is difficult at times. I want to make it clear that the police have the power to not give someone bail, if they believe that it is for the safety of the community and its best interests. We are talking about presumptions and the categorisation of prescribed and offensive weapons and we will consider that work. We need to make sure that we do it ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When will you consider it? Is it part of the review?

Mr CHAIR: I think she is about to conclude her answer and you will get to ask a supplementary.

Ms FYLES: We are doing that work thoroughly. Police are extremely hardworking. They have been provided with information about those categories and how they are defined in the Northern Territory legislation. That work is a part of that review; it will be presented when it is concluded.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will the review be made public?

Ms FYLES: I am happy for that to be made public. We want to make sure that Territorians understand the work that has been undertaken. I do not think the Leader of the Opposition has an understanding. She is implying that not much has happened in 90 days when there has been a huge amount of work. Police have the ability now not to give bail if that is in the best interests and safety of the community.

These are complex issues we are working through with a sense of urgency.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will you make the bail review public at the end of August?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Is that the full review?

Ms FYLES: Because you put end of August on there, we will make it public as soon as it comes back to us and has gone through the process. If that is before the end of August, that will be welcomed. It is not like we are sitting and waiting. If we get an action before then—we have already shown this—we will put it in place.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Will you make an unchanged version of the bail review given to you by your department available to the public?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIR: To be fair, Leader of the Opposition, she definitely answered your question. She said as soon as she gets it, she will put it out.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I disagree, but time will tell.

Who wrote the letter given to Jamie Chalker, informing him of his dismissal?

Ms FYLES: I believe, Mr Chair, that you made a ruling on this last week. I assume it still stands?

Mr CHAIR: I made a ruling on that last week. For everyone's clarity, the ruling was about the separation of Mr Chalker, the payout figure and anything after 30 March. For those who were not in the room, that still stands.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The reporting period to 30 March is so that the public service does not have to crunch the data past that point. Estimates is right through ...

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, you can spin it whichever way you want. I made a ruling of 30 March. You complied with that last week; it does not change for which minister is in the seat. Ask your questions up to 30 March. Anything related to the confidential payout figure for Mr Chalker is confidential, as it is for any member who is separated from the NT public service.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am not asking about the payout figure. I asked if the Chief Minister ...

Mr CHAIR: I am reminding you of the ruling.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: ... or her office wrote the letter. Actually, the Police minister told me to ask you. It would be unfair on her to not ask you directly, seeing as she was emphatic about it.

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, you made a ruling last week and that stands. Are you across that?

Mr CHAIR: In relation to the figure of Mr Chalker and anything after 30 March, yes, it stands.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who wrote the letter?

Ms FYLES: I reiterate the statement I made at the time:

After almost 3 1/2 years in the role, Jamie Chalker APM has retired from his commission as Northern Territory Police Commissioner and CEO for Fire and Emergency Services.

The announcement comes as Mr Chalker, who has served as an NT police officer for more than 25 years, and the NT Government resolved proceedings in the Supreme Court. The Administrator has accepted Mr Chalker's application to retire from the post of Police Commissioner.

Recruitment of a new Police Commissioner is under way. That is all the comment I can make.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I will ask you again. Was it you or a member of your staff who wrote the letter that was given to Jamie Chalker, which ended up being a major part of court proceedings filed against you?

Ms FYLES: I have said all I can say on this matter.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How come the Police minister was able to say she was not involved in his dismissal and did not write the letter?

Ms FYLES: The Leader of the Opposition very well knows, as a lawyer, that I cannot answer these questions. It is a confidential court settlement. I have pointed to the statement I made at the time and that is all I can say on this matter.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you bound by different rules from the Police minister?

Ms FYLES: I have said all I can say in this line of questioning.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is a fair question because she was quite open on elements of her answers, and very open about the fact it had nothing to do with her and that I should ask you. It is interesting you are sitting before me, sticking tightly to script as you so often do. This is not about the payout. Are you under different confidentiality obligations from the Police minister?

Ms FYLES: I have said all I can say on this matter.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I would like to ask a question on this.

Mr CHAIR: You may, Member for Araluen; it is good to have you back.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Did the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet pay for the legal fees for the separation agreement with Chalker?

Ms FYLES: I have made all the comments I can make on this matter.

Mr CHAIR: I can refer us all back to *Hansard* and get the answer for you on this. It was said during Estimates last week that the question fell under the Attorney General's office and would be discussed then. It is on record and it was referred to the Attorney-General for the Solicitor for the Northern Territory outputs.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is the answer no?

Mr CHAIR: The minister probably cannot because when we spoke last week, it was made clear that it all sat under the Attorney-General. We even said on record that the Attorney-General will be prepared to answer that question.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not want to get to the Attorney-General and find out that it was paid out of the Chief Minister and Cabinet's budget. Is the answer to the question no? Are you not answering the question?

Ms FYLES: I have said all I can say on this matter.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is about payment of legal fees, so you have to either direct us to the department that paid the legal fees or agree that you paid them or say that you did not pay them. It is a money issue.

Mr CHAIR: Just to clarify, Member for Araluen, that was the question you asked last time. The response ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: I did not ask that.

Mr CHAIR: Someone asked it last week in Estimates.

Ms FYLES: Perhaps I can suggest a way forward. I have said what I believe I can say on this matter. I am happy to take that question on notice and if I can provide that advice, I will. As you can understand from the statement I just read, I cannot answer these questions; it is a confidential court settlement matter.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am a little bewildered because last week we extracted the fact that the payment was paid out of the Police budget, but you are saying we cannot know where the legal fees were paid out of.

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take the question on notice and provide what I can. I have pointed to the statement that I said at the time.

Mr CHAIR: We will take it on notice. The Attorney-General's team is probably listening and tomorrow he is before us.

Ms FYLES: It is on notice, so if I can answer it afterwards, I will. I just want to get that advice.

Question on Notice No 5.5

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Were the legal fees for the separation of Police Commissioner Jamie Chalker paid out of the Chief Minister and Cabinet budget?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 5.5.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The Police minister was able to rule out that she asked Jamie Chalker to leave or that she wrote the letter or had anything to do with it. Did you ask Jamie Chalker to leave the top job?

Ms FYLES: I know that you need to get your grab on the news tonight, but I cannot speak about these matters. I have said all I am going to say.

Mr CHAIR: I am going to make a ruling under Standing Order 38. The minister has made it very clear that she cannot talk about it and I believe that you understand why. For that particular question, she gave her answer. Let us not continue down this path and become tedious repetition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you aware why the Police minister became embroiled in the litigation in the Supreme Court if she had nothing to do with it? If she had nothing to do with the sacking of Jamie Chalker, why was she party to the proceedings?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister said she cannot answer questions about that. Leader of the Opposition, you know this. You continue to go down this path. I would hate to get to a point where you are removed for one hour.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Mr Chair, I am not doing it to annoy you. I am asking questions to see whether they are the right questions.

Mr CHAIR: It is not about whether you are annoying. The Chief Minister has made it clear that she cannot answer questions in relation to Jamie Chalker.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But there might be another question I ask that she can. Just like the Police minister did not answer some but did answer others. She was able to deal with each question. I would appreciate the same from the Chief Minister. If a question comes up that she can answer, she should answer; that is Estimates. If she cannot, she can say 'I cannot'. It is very simple.

Mr CHAIR: It is the exact same question relating to who removed Mr Chalker. That is what you are asking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, that is not the same question.

Ms FYLES: I can provide some clarity. I am bound by confidentiality and cannot comment. For any questions to do with Mr Chalker, you will get the same response. The Leader of the Opposition can waste time or we can get on and talk about this great budget.

Mr CHAIR: It is up to you, Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: The settlement figure to Mr Chalker came out of the Police budget. Was there an opportunity for this to have come out of the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet instead?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the questions that I can answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But that has nothing to do with it. It is purely a budget allocation question.

Ms FYLES: I know that this was discussed with the Treasurer and the Police minister last week. I can point to their comments, but I cannot provide commentary.

Mr CHAIR: To be fair, that is a different way to ask the question, but the minister has given you a response.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question I would like to ask for the sheer hell of it, given that this is only my second question I have asked about this whole business. Did your mistakes in that letter that you apparently wrote to Mr Chalker result in a larger payout than he would have been entitled to if you terminated his contract through the proper process?

Ms FYLES: I cannot comment on these questions as they relate to a confidential court matter.

Mr CHAIR: Does that answer that question, Member for Araluen? It is an answer. It may not be the answer you were after.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It is very clear. I have no more questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Have you at any time requested that the Australian Federal Police be asked to support the efforts of our Northern Territory Police here in the Territory?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On 1 May—it was one day after your carefully scripted press conference announcing that there had been a resolution to proceedings with Mr Chalker—you had to issue a statement retracting some of your comments and clarifying. Who asked you to make this clarifying statement?

Ms FYLES: I cannot provide a response to any questions that relate to Mr Jamie Chalker as it is a confidential court settlement matter.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am just asking about your public press release. You issued two public press releases. What are you alluding to on 1 May that you said at the press conference was incorrect?

Ms FYLES: I provided the response. I cannot comment on these matters.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: In what way, had you misled the community the day before?

Ms FYLES: I cannot provide further commentary.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: But it is public. I have your press release here. Have you forgotten about it? Did they not put it in your pack?

Mr CHAIR: It is in the way you asked the question, Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who interpreted your comments that Mr Chalker only received his statutory and contractual entitlements under the settlement?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I cannot provide further commentary.

Mr CHAIR: Understood.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you agree with the Police minister, who said that crime has not reached the necessary point to ask for support from the Australian Federal Police?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure how it relates to my opening statement, but I am happy to provide a response to the Leader of the Opposition.

We receive support from the Commonwealth Government. We have been working closely with the Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller. The AFP is highly trained in targeted areas. In the Northern Territory we also had an intervention that brought in the military and disempowered Territorians living in remote Indigenous communities. I have full confidence in the Northern Territory Police Force. We have provided it with more resources than ever before to do the job of keeping Territorians safe. I point to that as a response to the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have to acknowledge that our police are under-resourced and understaffed. Ninety-seven per cent of police do not believe your government supports them and 97% of police do not think there are enough police to do their job. Having support from the Australian Federal Police, particularly in towns like Alice Springs, could provide a huge boost to numbers to be able to support Territory police who are having an excruciating time of trying to keep on top of the crime crisis that has caused chaos across the Territory under your government.

Do you not acknowledge that the Australian Federal Police could provide enormous reprieve to Northern Territory Police?

Ms FYLES: Our NT police work incredibly hard. We have given them more resources than ever before. We heard last week from the acting commissioner that 60 to 70 police recently returned to duties. We will continue to work with our police, their leadership and the police union. We will not play politics. We will make sure they

have more resources than ever before. Is there more work to do? Absolutely. We will continue because we think that the best people to keep the Territory safe are Territorians and Territory cops.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When were you last at the Centre for National Resilience?

Ms FYLES: I would have to check my diary. I was out there perhaps in March. I would have to take that on notice.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Despite all the media commentary on significant damage to Howard Springs, why did you not go out there yourself? Why did you send the Infrastructure minister?

Ms FYLES: I acknowledged many weeks ago that the damage at the Centre for National Resilience was substantial and unacceptable. When it became clear to me that it was more substantial, we acknowledged that. I went there a couple of times during the emergency operation. The minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Territory Families had lead roles in the welfare response and also in making sure that the infrastructure was satisfactory.

We work as a team and we all talk to each other. We do not generally throw Cabinet books and things around. You hear those stories from back in the CLP days. We work incredibly hard together. I visited the facility, but I acknowledged many weeks ago that the damage was more substantial and unacceptable.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Has the damage at Howard Springs gone from wear and tear to substantial and unacceptable?

Ms FYLES: I acknowledged that many weeks ago.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is funny, because your Infrastructure minister was still calling it ‘wear and tear’ last week, so maybe she did not have the new talking points from your media adviser. We better get those sent out quickly because the new tag line everyone is ‘substantial and unacceptable’. Maybe we will see that being stamped on crime posts across the Territory as we saw with ‘wear and tear’.

You have said time and again that the people who caused the damage would be held responsible and accountable and that there would be consequences. You throw around this type of language, which is meaningless to you. Why has no-one been charged for criminal damage at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for Police.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I asked the question of Police, and they said that no-one had been charged. As Chief Minister you are the one ensuring and reassuring the community that there would be consequences and accountability. How is your government delivering consequences and accountability to the people who caused criminal damage at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: I have full trust in the Northern Territory Police to investigate matters and, if appropriate, to lay charges. As I said, Police would be best to answer that question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: As Chief Minister you are not keeping track of whether people are being held accountable for their criminal activity.

Ms FYLES: That is the responsibility of police, and I fully support our Northern Territory Police Force.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you concerned by the fact no-one has been charged?

Ms FYLES: I will not make public commentary on our police force. I back them, I give them resources and I support them in the work they are doing. I will not be drawn into speculation around how hard they work.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can you let us know what the dollar figure is of when criminal damage is wear and tear and then when it transitions to become substantial and unacceptable?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question about the Centre for National Resilience. We had a natural disaster. I acknowledge the public servants who stood up and were redeployed from their jobs across the Territory—not just in the Top End—and the non-government organisations that worked with us to care for those people. I have provided a response to the Opposition Leader’s question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you embarrassed that on 5 April a tender went out to replace \$100,000 worth of mattresses, or 265 mattresses, yet on 12 April you continued to say in the media that it was not extensive damage? Is that a giant embarrassment for you and your government?

Ms FYLES: The minister for Infrastructure answered this question last week, and the second part of her question is an opinion.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is not an opinion because on 5 April your government issued a tender and yet seven days later you were still saying it was not extensive damage. Is \$100,000 worth of damage wear and tear or is it substantial and unacceptable?

Ms FYLES: This question was responded to by the minister for Infrastructure.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it was not. She said that it was wear and tear, so I am now asking you. Is \$100,000 worth of damage wear and tear or is it unacceptable and substantial?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The Chief Minister clearly stated that about five minutes ago.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It is interesting because the Infrastructure minister encouraged us to ask the Chief Minister. She said that we would be fortunate to have plenty of time this week to talk about it. She said we are fortunate because we have the Chief Minister in the second week this time. She said we have plenty of time to ask the Chief Minister as well. I am just not feeling ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: She answered the question about five minutes ago. We are going until five o'clock today and we have a lunch adjournment for half an hour.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Yes, we are.

There were several reports that there was extensive damage at Howard Springs. If you knew 600 windows had been damaged, why did you say there were 12 windows from one DV incident?

Ms FYLES: When it became clear to me that it was more substantial, I acknowledged that at the time.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No-one in the community thinks you did because you continued—even up until last week your own Infrastructure minister continued to say that this was wear and tear. You went on radio and were very emotional saying that this was upsetting for you, that the CLP was just essentially being scurrilous and that none of this was true.

As soon as the first report came out on significant damage to Howard Springs, who did you ask for advice on whether that was true?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the question. We were initially advised that it was wear and tear. When it became clear it was more substantial ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Who advised you it was wear and tear?

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, let her answer. She may get to that point.

Ms FYLES: As I was saying before I was rudely interrupted, we were advised that it was wear and tear. When it became clear it was more substantial, I acknowledged that at the time. The Leader of the Opposition is playing with words; I get that she needs to do that to get her grab on the news tonight. I acknowledged many weeks ago that the damage was substantial and unacceptable, but the large majority of individuals did the right thing. For those who did the wrong thing, it was unacceptable. We have acknowledged the damage at the facility.

I thank all the public servants who worked incredibly hard to support the Territorians who went through a natural disaster and needed to be located at the facility. I acknowledge the damage that was caused. Do I think it is acceptable? Absolutely not.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On 13 April your Deputy Chief Minister admitted that it was more than wear and tear, yet you continued to hold the line. What inquiries did you make so that you could be properly briefed on the damage to Howard Springs, and why did you not visit the facility?

Ms FYLES: I have answered these questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you visit the Howard Springs facility to inspect damage; and, if you did, when?

Ms FYLES: I have answered the questions and provided the time line of when I went.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: What was the date? I missed that.

Ms FYLES: I went there twice. I said that I would have to go back and check my diary.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: That is okay. We can put it on notice.

Ms FYLES: No. You do not need the exact dates.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I think I do, because your story does not stack up. The dates you were out there impact heavily on the time line.

Mr CHAIR: Let us ask the question and if the minister does not accept the question, we will move on.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: If she does not accept the question, it will be quite telling.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Can the Chief Minister please provide the dates she visited the Centre for National Resilience from the date on which the first flood victims arrived to present?

Ms FYLES: No, I do not need to. I visit facilities throughout the Northern Territory regularly. I am hardworking. I get out there and support our government departments. You have high-level officials here, people who have done an enormous amount of work.

Many weeks ago I acknowledged that the damage was substantial, but we had a situation where we had a natural disaster. Are you not interested in the repatriation of those people, how the facility is and the work that actually falls within the Chief Minister and Cabinet that I mentioned in my opening statement? Our team in Katherine has been working with the team in Daguragu and Yarralin. We had resources from New South Wales giving us tent accommodation.

I do not understand. You have been given repeated answers. I know you are fixated on this issue. I am not sure what you would have done.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: It goes to integrity. You have been in the public saying it was just wear and tear. Now we have heard, for the first time, you have been out there twice. People want to know, were you out there to see the damage? Did you see it for yourself and still tell the public it was wear and tear? This goes to the heart of integrity, scrutiny and transparency. It is a key fundamental for people about how you operate as a Chief Minister.

Did you go there before you sent the Infrastructure minister to inspect the damage?

Ms FYLES: Mr Chair, I try to answer a question and she rudely cuts me off. If she will not give me the courtesy to respond and share the information ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I just asked you on notice and you rejected my question.

Ms FYLES: My case in point. I am still trying to respond, but you feel the need to debate.

A huge amount of work has been undertaken, and I would love the opportunity to present it to the Estimates Committee. I note there are more committee members here than just the Opposition Leader, who will not even listen to my responses.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you visit Howard Springs before the Infrastructure minister?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister has answered the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have to keep asking new questions, Mr Chair. Did you visit the facility before the Territory Families minister?

Ms FYLES: I have provided my response.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Did you visit the facility before 19 April, when the Deputy Chief Minister did?

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister has answered the question. I am almost certain you will get the same answer to the question you keep asking.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: When you say she has answered it, you mean refused to answer.

Mr CHAIR: It is an answer.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She actually said nothing.

Mr CHAIR: I cannot dictate to or force a minister or you to ask a question or provide a particular answer. I am here to make sure the committee keeps a level of decorum and we get through all the outputs as best we can in the time allotted.

I ask that we bring this back to the opening statement. We have a number of public servants who made the time to be here today and we have not moved from the opening statement to get to the outputs, and we are 15 minutes from lunch. Leader of the Opposition, with that in mind, do you have any further questions on the opening statement?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I certainly do. On 20 April you were questioned on Channel Nine about whether the damage to the facility was wear and tear.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, Channel Nine was not in the opening statement. I will draw you back to the opening statement.

Ms FYLES: We love Channel Nine; it is nothing against Channel Nine.

Mr CHAIR: Absolutely. Minister, if I could finish.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: We do not need censorship, Mr Chair. I will ask my questions, and she can keep saying she has answered them.

Mr CHAIR: You do not need censorship, but you clearly need guidance because you are not listening. When you are talking, you are not listening. We had the same problem with the Member for Barkly last week, and he is doing a good amount of listening. I could rattle off all the things that were in the opening statement. I have put up with a lot of it ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are being quite aggressive.

Mr CHAIR: Ask your questions as per the opening statement, or we can move to outputs.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not think we need an aggressive Chair in Estimates.

Mr CHAIR: Being condescending does not help either. If you have a question on the opening statement, feel free to ask it.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I have many questions.

The Deputy Chief Minister admitted there was substantial damage on 19 April, yet on 20 April you continued to maintain it was just wear and tear. Who is telling the truth, you or your deputy?

Mr CHAIR: Standing Order 38; tedious repetition. You will cease that line of questioning. The Chief Minister has answered. If you do not like it, you can put it in writing, as normal process, but we will move away from that.

If there are members of the Estimates Committee who have further questions on the opening statement, now would be the time to do so.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Your government has now hired a full-time role on a salary of \$180,000 per year to manage the repairs at the Howard Springs facility; is that correct?

Ms FYLES: I believe this question was asked of the minister for Infrastructure last week, and she provided a response. I appreciate the committee's flexibility with my hearings, but I stayed in touch and took the time to read the large majority of the proceedings.

Mr CHAIR: The minister is correct. The CLP asked this question at Estimates last week and the answer was provided by the Infrastructure Commissioner and the general manager of DIPL.

Mrs LAMBLEY: A point of order, Mr Chair! There is no rule in Estimates to say that you cannot ask the same question of different ministers. That is not a premise of Estimates.

Mr CHAIR: I understand your point and agree with you. I am merely adding to the end of her statement that it has been answered already.

Ms FYLES: It was under the output for DIPL.

Mr CHAIR: Correct, and it was not in the opening statement on the position.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am trying to get to the bottom of what the Chief Minister is responsible for. So far in this entire process, she has shirked every bit of responsibility for any of the issues I raised questions about.

As the Chief Minister and the lead minister in your government with the lead agency for this government, what is the total dollar figure you are expecting Howard Springs damage to cost you? Surely a multimillion-dollar blowout like this would be of some interest to you.

Ms FYLES: I believe that question was also directed to the minister for Infrastructure. DIPL provided infrastructure repairs across Northern Territory Government assets and properties that are leased. I point to the output area. It is not a responsibility of the Chief Minister and Cabinet; it is the responsibility of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you not know?

Mr CHAIR: That is not what the Chief Minister said. She referred to the output of DIPL.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She is able to speak, you do realise that. She could just answer the question. It is meant to be as less interventionist as possible. If I have asked a question and she does want to answer, she can just tell me.

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, we keep going around in circles. She has referred it to the output for DIPL.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You have been the Alcohol Policy minister since coming to ...

Mr CHAIR: Here we go!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Are you happy now I have moved on? He is the Chair and he is relieved I have moved on from an important line of questioning.

Mr CHAIR: Just relate it to the portfolio.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I am astonished.

You have been the Alcohol Policy minister for the entire time Labor has been in government, over the last seven or so years, and you ignored the calls from local Indigenous leaders; the opposition; people across the Northern Territory, particularly in Alice Springs; Aboriginal health organisations; other members of parliament; and even the Labor Member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour. They warned you not to remove Stronger Futures. Why did it take you so long to see how destructive and dysfunctional your actions were before you brought in change?

Ms FYLES: We have done more than any other government to address alcohol-related harm. We know how much that impacts our community across the Northern Territory. It is a longstanding issue.

It was the Coalition federal government that walked away without putting in place any measure. I remind the Leader of the Opposition, who loves to rewrite history, that it was her mates in Canberra who did nothing.

If you want to talk about what we have done to reduce the harm from what is a legal product, I am happy to speak in detail. There are many measures; there is not a single measure that will tackle these issues. We work incredibly hard.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: On 5 August last year you said that you will not be putting back in place race-based law. Then a couple of months ago you effectively re-enacted Stronger Futures legislation at a Territory level. Do you believe the legislation you brought in this year was race-based legislation?

Ms FYLES: I note the word you used carefully in there—‘effectively’. They were different. We will continue to be agile and respond to community needs for alcohol measures that reduce the harm and stop the flow to those who do the wrong thing. In terms of that specific question, they are two different things. It was the federal Coalition, that is now in opposition, which walked away leaving nothing in place. The Territory government has put it in place, and will continue to be agile with alcohol policy.

There is not just one solution for one area; there needs to be a lot of solutions for different areas in the Territory to tackle this issue.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Do you acknowledge that it was a devastating impact and your mistake?

Ms FYLES: Alcohol policy is complex. There is a number of measures. We need to stop the supply to those people who cause harm. We know that secondary supply is a factor. We know that most licensees do the right thing, but some do not. We have a strong risk-based licensing regime.

We have done an enormous amount of work on alcohol policy. It is one that the CLP put in the too-hard basket. It is an area I have kept as Chief Minister and brought it into Chief Minister and Cabinet so that we can get that overarching government and community view to make sure we tackle these issues and try to reduce the harm.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why did it take you over six months to implement a Territory version of the Stronger Futures legislation? Why did it take you six months to bring in legislated alcohol restrictions after you saw the increase in crime; the devastation it was having on people’s lives; and the impact on families, children and communities across the Territory? Why were you so slow to act following the expiration of Stronger Futures?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for the federal opposition because they were the ones who ...

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: No, it is not. At the end of Stronger Futures, it took you over six months to bring in Territory legislation ...

Mr CHAIR: Leader of the Opposition, you are being disorderly. Let her answer your question. It was about five seconds of an answer. She barely had a chance to respond.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: She asked me to direct my question to the federal opposition, which is ridiculous.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, but then at that point she may have been able to finish it off. Give the minister a chance to finish. Then you can ask the same question again, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms FYLES: It was the federal Coalition, when in government, that did nothing. They let it lapse. It was too hard for them. We put in place a measure in the Territory to help communities remain dry.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: Why did you not do it immediately if that is what you wanted? If you wanted Stronger Futures to continue ...

Ms FYLES: Can I answer the question, please, Mr Chair?

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: You are blaming the previous federal government. If you wanted Stronger Futures to continue, why did you not implement your legislation immediately?

Mr CHAIR: Most questions you are asking do not have a simple yes or no answer. The minister should be afforded the chance to answer the question as best she can in the way she sees fit. If you are unhappy with that, you ask a supplementary question. We have gone around this multiple times today.

Ms FYLES: We will continue to put in place policies and legislation in the space of alcohol to reduce the harm to our community. I have always said that if our policies do not deliver the benefits we seek for our community, we will revisit them. We have been true to our word for the last seven years.

The Stronger Futures legislation, the repeat of the intervention, disempowered Aboriginal Territorians. Have you come up with an opinion on the Voice yet, Leader of the Opposition? It disempowered Indigenous Territorians; it was race based. It was based on your address.

What we have done—unlike that measure and unlike the Liberal-National government that sat there while about 30 to 40 community alcohol plans sat on the shelves in Canberra—is put in place legislation that has a clear process for a community to be either dry or allow takeaway alcohol in that area, how it is managed and if there is harm, how that is managed.

It was incredibly disempowering for remote communities under the nine years of the Coalition. I would visit ministers in Canberra who would proudly point to the alcohol management plans sitting in their offices that they did not want to sign off on, even though community members had come together and looked at how alcohol should be available in their community.

We talk about local decision-making and we talk about empowering all Territorians. We had a situation where the Coalition not only walked away from the legislation without putting anything in place, but would not even look at the alcohol plans of the communities that had taken the time to do the work. It was just no alcohol. It is a legal product. Everyone in this room can have a drink at their house, but people were not able to do so based on their address.

We have put in place legislation that has the principle of local decision-making. It has a clear pathway of how a community manages alcohol and if there is harm, how that is managed. The Leader of the Opposition is factually incorrect in the statements that she is asking within the questions.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: To confirm, the Stronger Futures legislation meant that people could not drink alcohol at their home. How is your legislation different? If someone lives in a remote community that is now dry under your legislation, are they allowed to drink alcohol at their home?

Ms FYLES: Under the Coalition's Stronger Futures there was no opportunity for them. Even if they had done the work through their alcohol management plans, they just sat in Canberra. They predominantly—based on race, of the addresses, of the location where people lived—were denied takeaway alcohol.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: How are you denying takeaway alcohol? Is it based on something other than their address? I am curious.

Mr CHAIR: You will be curious in two seconds when she finishes answering the question.

Mrs FINOCCHIARO: I do not think she is answering my question at all.

Mr CHAIR: That is a matter for the Chair to determine. She is giving an answer. Let her finish.

Ms FYLES: There is a clear process for community alcohol plans to be developed. There are two ways a community can cease being an interim APA under the act. The interim APA can be revoked by the Director of Liquor Licensing or a community can be declared a general restricted area by the Liquor Commission. They are the two different pathways.

This shows the ignorance of the Leader of the Opposition. One of those pathways has been in the Territory for decades. Some communities have had that system, yet other communities were not afforded the same rights because the federal Coalition let those community-developed alcohol management plans sit on the shelf in Canberra.

We have a clear pathway that does not discriminate but allows for alcohol, acknowledging the harm it can cause when people do the wrong thing.

Mr CHAIR: Before we continue, noting we are five minutes from lunch, the Member for Mulka has patiently sat there with some questions. Member for Mulka, do you have any questions on the opening statement?

Mr GUYULA: Thank you, Chair.

While Nhulunbuy prepares to transition away from being a private mining town and Gove Peninsula prepares for this transition, what is the government doing to ensure that all Yolngu clans from across the Gove Peninsula are involved in the consultation process for the future of Gove? At this stage I understand the government is working with the Rirratjingu and Gumatj Corporations, but how will government ensure that all clans and families are included in this process?

Ms FYLES: When in Nhulunbuy recently, I was updated by the team from Chief Minister and Cabinet there about how we are supporting the township of Nhulunbuy—Gove—an important township supporting the region. I acknowledge all the communities and outstations in a wonderful part of the Northern Territory. We need to make sure they are well supported going forward with this transition.

I will ask Maree De Lacey to provide you with the information for the areas you went into. I hope that answers your question. If not, I can come back and perhaps give more.

Ms DE LACEY: There is a reference group, the Gove Peninsula Futures Reference Group, which is made up of a number of organisations, including NIAA, the Aboriginal corporations and the Northern Land Council. There is a process associated with this for consultation and engagement more broadly with communities and clans across the area that is affected. That is being led by Chief Minister and Cabinet in the East Arnhem region.

Mr GUYULA: You mentioned rocket launches. Do you know how many full-time permanent positions have been created by ELA in Gove? What are the positions, and how many Yolngu are employed?

Ms FYLES: I will take the question on notice. The partnership between Equatorial Launch Australia and the Gumatj is amazing. It is an example of working together and delivering economic opportunity on country. We will take the specifics on notice. I do not think either of the officials I have looked to have that response.

Question on Notice No 5.6

Mr CHAIR: Member for Mulka, please restate the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: You mentioned rocket launches. Do you know how many full-time permanent positions have been created by ELA in Gove? What are these positions? How many Yolngu are employed?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 5.6.

Mr GUYULA: ELA has discussed the possibility of using the Arnhem Space Centre for Defence machines. Could you advise further on the NT Government and Commonwealth Government discussions of the claims and whether this is supported by your government?

Ms FYLES: There has been nothing that has been discussed that I am aware of. Obviously, Defence and the northern presence was a big part of the strategic review. Defence engages with commercial providers. The Defence team within Northern Territory Government provides support. I am happy to offer you a briefing about your electorate and future Defence plans and outline in that briefing the consultations that are undertaken. That is probably the best way to go forward. There is nothing specific that I have seen that has been signed off.

Mr GUYULA: What Defence developments are expected in north-east Arnhem Land in the next decade? Could you advise what ideas are being discussed for this region?

Ms FYLES: I point to the offer of the briefing. That would be most constructive. There is nothing specific. From that Defence Strategic Review, Northern Australia will play a key role. Defence is looking towards

Nhulunbuy and that peninsula area. Defence obviously has a presence in the Top End in both Katherine and Darwin, but there are no firm plans I am aware of. That briefing would provide you with an overview.

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, Member for Mulka, it has just ticked over 12.30 pm. How many more do you have, just quickly?

Mr GUYULA: I have two more.

Mr CHAIR: The Chief Minister is happy, so let us do two more to clear them.

Mr GUYULA: How much funding has been provided by the Northern Territory Government for major significant and government-facilitated projects in the Mulka electorate since 2016? What projects have received in-kind funding or will receive funding in this budget?

Mr CHAIR: Sorry, Member for Mulka, in the interests of time, that best fits under Output Group 13.0, Output 13.1, Major, Significant and Government-Facilitated Projects. Ask that question when we get to major projects.

The Estimates Committee will adjourn until 1 pm.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: I welcome you all back after lunch.

We left off with some questions from the Member for Mulka, but we will hold off on those. I will defer to the Member for Namatjira for any other questions you would like to ask of the opening statement, or are you happy to move to the outputs?

Mr YAN: Yes, I have a question on the opening statement.

We spoke last week with the Minister for Territory Families about the service mapping for Central Australia and the Barkly. The minister referred us to you. Are you able to provide an update on where the service mapping is at for Central Australia and for the Barkly, please?

Ms FYLES: Yes. Good to see you, Member for Namatjira, and I hope that you are feeling a bit better today. I was worried that I would not get my Health questions from you.

I read that in the transcript. I know there was a bit of conversation about where the boundaries are. I will hand to Maree De Lacey from the department who will be able to talk you through that. I am happy to have any follow-up questions.

Ms DE LACEY: In terms of Central Australia the youth service mapping project is currently being undertaken in collaboration with NIAA, the National Indigenous Australians Agency. This aims to identify, map and analyse government expenditure on youth services in Alice Springs. At the moment they have done a lot of collaboration and engagement with youth services, in particular around Central Australia. They have developed a draft report just for their own internal use in terms of what the scope may look like for this project. They have drafted an implementation plan and established a working group. At this stage I cannot give you a completion date for the project, but it is under way.

Mr YAN: Who is leading that from NIAA?

Ms DE LACEY: I do not know the name of the person who is leading it from NIAA.

Mr YAN: That is all right. I will be able to find out from down my way.

Mr MALEY: Have you got the resources available to do that mapping properly?

Ms DE LACEY: The team is scoping it out in a way that is able to be delivered within the resources. That is part of the work that they are doing in developing the implementation plan. The implementation plan is about how to do this task within the available resources.

Mr MALEY: It is still only in the planning stage. Is that correct?

Ms DE LACEY: Yes. They have drafted an implementation plan for their working group so that is where they are. Now, they are beginning the process for how they implement.

Mr MALEY: Who is on that working group?

Ms DE LACEY: It has NIAA and a number of other government agencies. I may have to take that on notice in terms of who all the members of that working group would be.

Question on Notice No 5.7

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Who is on the working group and what members make up the working group?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.7.

Mrs LAMBLEY: My question relates to the topic that was being discussed just before the lunchbreak around the expiry of the Stronger Futures legislation.

It was interesting to hear your version of what happened historically because you remember the Coalition government having alcohol management plans sitting on its desk. I remember Labor ministers, specifically Jenny Macklin, being accused of exactly the same thing, but that is neither here nor there.

Why did the Prime Minister come to Alice Springs in late January?

Ms FYLES: As you would recall, at that time there was quite a lot of commentary. I spoke to the Prime Minister, as I do fairly regularly, acknowledging he is the Prime Minister and a very busy person. There was the opportunity for him to come to Central Australia in his calendar so that was the reason he was able to attend Alice.

Mrs LAMBLEY: He came at very short notice, though, did he not?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: He literally detoured into Alice Springs from a trip he was already on; is that correct?

Ms FYLES: I think he came specifically. I had been on some leave and came back from leave.

To go back a step, we saw the statistics for alcohol-related harm were fairly steady through to about November. It was in the December/January statistics that we started to see with the alcohol-related harm that something was going on that was more than seasonal variations, which I know you, as a long-term Central Australian resident, were familiar with. We started to look into Central Australia specifically about what was happening. I guess that coincided with the Prime Minister's visit.

Mrs LAMBLEY: His visit coincided with what locals would describe as a climax in the crime crisis in town. It was a much welcomed turning point. When the Prime Minister came to town, you and Aboriginal leaders and leaders from across the Northern Territory met. What was discussed in that meeting that you had with the Prime Minister?

Ms FYLES: I will not go into the ins and outs of private meetings, but I discussed the issues across the Territory and the issues that are specific to that area quite regularly, particularly being the Health minister as well as Chief Minister. That was in terms of what the statistics were showing us, what people were saying, what was the best response and what is the best response. There is not a single thing and it is not like we can just tick a box and say it has been done. It is a continuation of hard work.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Shortly after the Prime Minister visited, you backflipped on your government's decision to not implement alcohol restrictions across the Northern Territory that were lifted under the Stronger Futures expiring legislation. What prompted that backflip?

Ms FYLES: As I was saying before lunch, we put in place measures, and have done for a number of years, being agile and being responsive to the community's needs. The Coalition walked away from the Stronger Futures legislation, leaving nothing in place. We had put in place a measure, but off the back of the statistics we were seeing and what we were hearing from the community, we made further changes. It was not going back; it was different again.

It will not be the last time we adjust alcohol policy settings. It is a space that needs to be continually adjusted. Nhulunbuy is going through processes presently about what is best for that community to restrict the supply of what is a legal product. That is why you also see different measures in different locations across the Territory, which I know you are well familiar with.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You might think that what you implemented was different, but locals see it as the same—a reinstalling of what was there before. That is the perception. It is certainly my perception and that of anyone you talk to in town. It was you basically putting back those alcohol restrictions that were in place under the Stronger Futures legislation. Are you not trying to spin a story that suits your narrative, rather than once again just being honest?

Ms FYLES: With respect, Member for Araluen, it is different. There is a clear pathway for a community to manage alcohol in its remote community or town camp. We did not have that previously, so I believe it is different from what was in place.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many communities or town camps have an alcohol management plan in place since you—I will call it—backflipped?

Ms FYLES: There are none that have formally gone through the process. Communities understand that there is a process and that they can engage in it. There are two pathways. They can go down the path where they have a permit system or they can have takeaway alcohol available, like other residents of Alice Springs, if the community agrees.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Given that nothing has changed because there are no alcohol management plans in place—do you get what I am saying? From a perceptual point of view, you have just gone back to the Stronger Futures legislation requirements in terms of banning alcohol in 400 or more communities and town camps. There is nothing different in practice, is there?

Ms FYLES: I disagree with you. There is a clear pathway for a community, if they wish to have takeaway alcohol. They can go through that process and be granted the ability to have takeaway alcohol.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The problem that came about when the Stronger Futures legislation expired was that alcohol just flooded the town camps and all those communities that had been dry for over 15 years. The subsequent alcohol-related harm skyrocketed. It went through the roof. The crime, domestic violence and lawlessness was outrageous. That is why in Alice Springs it culminated in a public meeting that 3,000 people attended. National media came to town. There was a flurry of public, social action regarding the fallout from these alcohol restrictions being lifted.

How can you not take some responsibility, given the fact that in every other state and territory, it is their responsibility to implement alcohol policies? We were an anomaly because of the intervention. In every other part of the country, you do not have the federal government managing alcohol policy. It was your turn, and it was made very clear to you, as the Northern Territory Government, that once the Stronger Futures legislation expired, it was then up to you to take over.

Ms FYLES: Looking at alcohol-related harm statistics, the monthly data through to November was fairly steady. There would be a decrease, an increase and a decrease. It really was that November/December information that I just pointed to that started to come through. That is where you have to be agile with the policy that you have in place. That continues throughout the Territory, stepping away from Alice Springs. You may have a different measure, like the 48-hour stop sale that police may implement. You will see the impact of risk-based licensing that the Liquor Commission will put in place and measure. We are trying to stop the harm to those who drink irresponsibly.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Why did it take for the Prime Minister to come to town before you actually listened to the people of Central Australia? We were all suffering so badly. Last week, I was emotional about it. I feel a bit more contained about it today. You turned your back on us for a long time, watching crime spiral out of control, whether your stats reflect that or not. That is what we saw and experienced. It took the Prime Minister to come to town for you to take the action that you have taken, which has been good.

Ms FYLES: I point to the fact that with alcohol policy, you always have to be agile and have different measures for different places. There will be measures that will change. We often see with alcohol measures that they are implemented and then we see a reduction in the harm-related statistics that we often point to, which is the Police and Health statistics. Then we will start to see that impact wear off and they will start to come up again.

It is looking at what works. That is why we review the mechanisms we have. The three-year liquor review is in train at the moment. We have been talking to industry and those who work in the harm minimisation space to have a policy setting that restricts the sale of what is a legal product to those who cause harm, while acknowledging that for the majority of people it does not cause harm and they should have access to it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I guess the most bewildering part of the whole thing was the fact many Aboriginal leaders across the whole country were calling on you to reinstate those alcohol restrictions, and you chose to ignore them. It was not until the Prime Minister came that you decided to change your policy. Why did you ignore all those people? There was a queue, was there not?

Ms FYLES: I can assure you that we were not ignoring people. Some people working in the health space will argue for different measures, and as a government we must try to find that balance with what is a legal product. Your community currently has the restrictions in place, which were put in temporarily. We had three months of data that showed a substantial decrease in February, then there was an increase in March and April saw another decrease. We need more data.

Some people say it is an imposition and question why they should not be able to buy alcohol on two days a week. Others are saying it provides respite for frontline workers. That articulates the difficulty of alcohol policy and having measures in place that reduce harm with the least amount of impact on the broader community.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The only Aboriginal organisation that was advocating those alcohol restrictions be lifted was Tangentyere Council. Can you name any other that was saying you cannot do this? It was clear. You say you have to be agile—you were sluggish and negligent, not agile at all. I have never known such a chorus of Aboriginal organisations and leaders criticising a Labor government before. You were being besieged and overwhelmed by criticism, yet you are saying that is normal and nothing special in the scheme of things. Is that what you are telling me?

Ms FYLES: What I am saying is that alcohol policy is incredibly complex.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Everything is complex; I get that.

Ms FYLES: Yes, it is.

Mr MALEY: You just told us that crime and antisocial behaviour increased in the last two months of the year. Is that correct?

Ms FYLES: The statistics in November and December, for me, were more about the information coming from Health and the hospital.

Mr MALEY: That increase in crime and antisocial behaviour was a direct result of the alcohol bans being lifted when Stronger Futures finished; is that correct?

Ms FYLES: The difficulty with alcohol policy is that people get a product that is legal ...

Mr MALEY: I accept that, but ...

Ms FYLES: I am answering the question. They misuse that product and then cause harm to themselves or other people in the community. When you put in place a measure, you often see a reduction in harm, but over time it will plateau and you see the harm elevate. You will also see secondary supply as an issue when

you restrict supply. That is why it is not one single measure. That is also why you need to be able to adjust measures across the Territory for different locations.

Mr MALEY: In regard to the crime increase, all the evidence I read was attributed to the alcohol. There was more alcohol in the community and more crime and antisocial behaviour. Have you done any research on the cost to Alice Springs with the increase in crime?

Ms FYLES: I note the theme of your questioning in Estimates as an opposition. There is work done on alcohol-related harm, but not specifically during that period.

Mr MALEY: Do you accept that the increase in crime and antisocial behaviour affected Alice Springs in relation to tourist numbers?

Ms FYLES: I will not get into that detail, but what I am saying is alcohol ...

Mr MALEY: Why not? I think it is an important discussion to have. From the facts and figures and from conversations I have had with people all over the Territory, they are telling me there was a crime wave or crisis that came at the lifting of those alcohol restrictions. That crime wave, or crisis, was advertised all over Australia, if not internationally, which affected tourist numbers.

The increase in crime because of the Labor government's failure to manage alcohol policy affected tourism and businesses, and we have all heard stories of people saying, 'Enough is enough; I am leaving Alice Springs'. What was the overall effect of your alcohol policy, which increased crime and antisocial behaviour in the town in general?

Ms FYLES: With respect, I disagree with your question because you then suddenly pivoted to the whole of the Territory.

Mr MALEY: People in the whole Territory told me about Alice Springs.

Ms FYLES: No, you said the whole of the Territory.

Mr MALEY: I will put it back to Alice Springs. People around the Territory told me, and in reading articles, that the increase in crime in Alice Springs affected tourism and the whole of the community and it relates back to the Labor government's failed alcohol policy.

Ms FYLES: I disagree with the premise of your question. We talked about this before lunch and we have continued the line of questioning.

Mr MALEY: Has there been a separate budget line committed to the alcohol management plans?

Ms FYLES: I will outline the process and then hand to the officials. A community can have an interim APA revoked if it makes an application to the Director of Liquor Licensing that satisfies the following criteria:

- the community has satisfactorily put in place a community alcohol plan that 60% of the adults who reside in that community support
- the application contains the signed consent of the registered owners of the land
- the Director of Liquor Licensing is satisfied that based on the information provided the revocation of an interim APA is in the public interest and will not have a significant adverse impact on the community.

The director will also consult with the NT police and NT healthcare providers in the area and any other stakeholders considered relevant. It is a robust process.

In terms of supporting the communities to do that work, yes, there is a pathway for them.

Mr MALEY: Who is a registered owner of Aboriginal land?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: Generally, we go through the land councils, which tell us who the proper TO or groups of TOs are to sign off on that. That is the process we used under previous interim APA processes set out under the *Liquor Act*. It seems to be working.

Mr MALEY: I will declare a conflict of interest because my wife is a traditional owner for Bulgul. I will relate back to that because I am aware of how it works. Her family is one of a group of traditional owners, and I am sure this is the same with all Aboriginal land. How do you get consent from the Aboriginal owner if there are groups and one, two or 10 of them do not agree? How do you work out the consent of the registered owner when there are multiple families, as it should be, and there are differences of opinion amongst those TOs?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: We rely on the advice of land councils as it is their job to tell us who the appropriate landowner or person is to sign off and it may be more than one.

Mr MALEY: Have funds been committed to develop these alcohol management plans?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: Within the NT Government there are established units within the Department of Health that work in alcohol and other drugs and with communities. They work to manage alcohol in their communities. A team has been working with communities on developing community alcohol plans where there is an appetite from a community to do that.

There was a Commonwealth budget announcement this year for the Territory to assist communities in getting access to consultants to help them development a plan, if that is what they want to do. We have online resources to help communities who want to do it on their own. They can download templates and staff can help them.

Mr MALEY: You said no alcohol management plans exist now. Have any communities applied for a plan?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: None have applied, but I am aware that seven communities are well under way and 17 town camps in Alice Springs are working with staff to develop their plans.

Mr MALEY: How long have they been working to do that?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: Since we announced the start of it. It is not with me but other staff members.

Mr MALEY: In 2017 the Riley report recommended that there should be consultation with communities about future management plans. That was six years ago and we still do not have any.

Ms FYLES: That is two different things. It is important to understand the context of the numbers. There are hundreds of communities, outstations and community purpose areas on Aboriginal land or native title that would fall under this. When the legislation reverted, the large majority went back to being dry communities under Territory legislation. The Commonwealth came in over the top. What changed was around opt-in and opt-out. There is a clear template for anyone interested in a community alcohol plan. They can download it and explore the processes. They also can, if they wish to, be a community that applies for permits. That has been in place for some time, but the Commonwealth legislation overruled it, and we could not hand out those permits. You have seen Barunga, I think recently, through their alcohol plan have gone for on-premises. Some communities will have takeaway, some will want on-premises. It is not straightforward for every community to be the same. It varies and takes into account the community's views.

Mr MALEY: Can you give an estimate of when you think the first alcohol management plan will be in place? I know it is a difficult question.

Ms FYLES: Yes. The Director of Licensing has to be satisfied, based on the information provided, that the ramification of the APA is in the public interest and will not have a significant adverse impact on the community. It could vary because it could be a couple of houses, it might be 40 or 50 people, so not a huge number in a remote location, or it could be a larger community or town camp. There are variables within that.

Mr MALEY: I accept that. But in the work that has been done with all the communities you just mentioned, how many of them are almost ready? Are they 80% finished, 20% finished or 90% finished in relation to coming up with a plan that is ready to be put on the table? How far are we down that line?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: I cannot answer that; I do not know.

Mr MALEY: Who would know that?

Ms D'ALESSANDRO: The community would know it. These are plans owned by community. It might be that when they go through the community development plan process, they decide that they do not want a 100% lifting of alcohol restrictions, so they do not want to apply to the director for a lifting of restrictions.

Mr MALEY: But do you provide any support for them to develop those plans?

Ms D’ALESSANDRO: Yes, through the Department of Health or DCMC’s regional staff.

Mr MALEY: That is what I am getting at. That help that you are providing, can you give the committee an estimate of how far you are down the path of getting at least one of those plans up and running?

Ms FYLES: I understand that you want to know where things are at. How about I take that question on notice, and we can come back to you. It is a bit of a variable because they might get all their paperwork sorted and then ...

Mr MALEY: I am just after an estimate. I fully accept that you would not be able to say one plus one equals two, but you might say you think 80% of two of them are done or 20% on three of them are done.

Ms FYLES: It could be a situation where they do a really ...

Mr MALEY: We will take it on notice.

Ms FYLES: Can I just finish?

Mr MALEY: Sorry.

Ms FYLES: It could be they do a robust plan, it gets ticked off by everyone, then gets to the Director of Licensing and something is identified that they do not have. It could be that if there is an increase in a statistic in that community, how do we restrict the supply of the alcohol? If it is a town camp, it could be if we start to see the police and health statistics increase, and in a remote community it could be domestic and family violence statistics. There has to be a measure to mitigate that. It could be at that point it needs to be worked through. It is difficult. I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.8

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you please give us an estimate of how far down the path the alcohol management plans are with the communities that you are currently aware of and you are working with?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. We will give the Estimates Committee an estimate.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.8.

Mr CHAIR: I note the Member for Araluen’s line of questions ended and there was no previous questions on the opening statement at the start. We will now move into the output groups and proceed from there.

Ms FYLES: I was going to suggest that some of the questions that are starting to come up could be dealt with in outputs.

OUTPUT GROUP 11.0 – ADVICE AND COORDINATION **Output 11.1 – Strategic Policy Coordination and Engagement**

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 12.0 – TERRITORY REGIONAL GROWTH **Output 12.1 – Regional Development, Local Government and Aboriginal Interpreters**

No questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 13.0 – INVESTMENT TERRITORY
Output 13.1 – Major, Significant and Government-Facilitated Projects

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move onto Output Group 13.0, Investment Territory, Output Group 13.1, Major, Significant and Government-Facilitated Projects. Just before I go to you, Member for Mulka, we will hand over to the CLP. We know your line of questioning.

Mr YAN: Just following up on discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, the ship lift was announced by the CLP back in 2015. It was re-announced in 2017 and 2019 by Labor. When we were questioning DIPL, it was revealed that you spent \$14m last year on this project. What do we have to show for that expenditure of \$14m?

Ms FYLES: I will hand to Jason Schoolmeester from Major Projects. Before I do, we are 100% committed to this project. It is really important for the Top End. It is such an opportunity for us to service larger vessels that presently have to track down to WA or across to Queensland, particularly with the marine industry that we have in the Top End and the expansion of Defence.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I do not handle the ship lift project at all. It is run by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics.

Mr CHAIR: Do you just want to restate the question, Member for Namatjira?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take it on notice if that is helpful. Do you have a series of questions? I have some notes here.

Mr YAN: Yes, thank you, Chief Minister.

Mr MALEY: Can you explain why the Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics minister said that it is not her responsibility and passed it on to the Chief Minister?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: There is some work being done by the department on the ship lift, but it is being transferred over to the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics. The only remaining work that we are really doing is in relation to the third-party access regime.

Mr YAN: I am happy to do the question on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.9

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: To date, there has been \$14m spent on the ship lift project. Can I have a breakdown on what that \$14m has been spent on?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.9.

Ms FYLES: From my understanding of the project, they have been doing some of the early stages such as unexploded ordnances and some of the design work.

Mr YAN: Over the years, from the announcements that we have seen, it was 90 metres and now has become 103 metres. Has there been any change to this project after the last announcement on the 103-metre ship lift?

Ms FYLES: My understanding is no. It is for vessels up to 5,000 tonnes.

Mr YAN: Has there ever been a business case prepared for the ship lift?

Ms FYLES: I cannot recall seeing one, but it is a project that has been through pretty robust processes. I am happy to take that on notice.

Mr YAN: Thank you. If we take that on notice, we can probably add another question. If there has been a business case developed, are you able to table it?

Ms FYLES: I will have to take it on notice, but I get the second part.

Question on Notice No 5.10

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: Has a business case ever been prepared for the ship lift project; and, if there has been one, are you able to table that?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.10.

Mr YAN: I also asked Minister Manison about the Amphibian Aerospace Industries project, and she passed some of those questions on to your office as a major project. So far the Northern Territory Government has invested \$10m into the AAI project. How many planes have been completed so far for that investment?

Ms FYLES: This is an exciting project. It is wonderful to see AAI in the Territory. It is a great story. I encourage anyone listening to google it. We have seen the prototype amphibious aircraft relocated from Melbourne to Darwin. I have been there with Minister Manison and have seen it at the hangar at the airport. We will start to see those planes retrofitted so that we can get them flying, and then building them in the Territory.

Jason may want to add a bit further.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Amphibian Aerospace Industries was granted up to \$10m from the Local Jobs Fund. They have not taken or drawn down the entire amount. We have put \$1.5m into the company via equity and a \$2.5m loan has been provided to them. We still have capacity to support the company as the needs arise.

They are raising their own equity, so those amounts may never be required in regard to the full \$10m. As the Chief Minister mentioned, the priority of the program right now is to upgrade the plane to a modern engine—they call it a type certification process—then establish its first working constructed plane, then eventually full-rate construction.

As you can imagine it is a complex enterprise, so the focus now is on the type certification and refurbishment of existing planes to build cash flow and to secure land in Darwin for the manufacturing facility. That is 2023. In 2024 they will focus on factory production. In 2026–27 they will focus on full-rate production of the aircraft.

Ms FYLES: AAI is the holder of the Federal Aviation Administration type certificate for the HU-16 and the G-111 Albatross. They hold that type certificate, so they can refurb and build new planes. It is exciting that we have managed to secure this in the Territory, as opposed to potentially in other Australian jurisdictions or overseas. It is a robust aircraft and an exciting opportunity.

Mr MALEY: You mentioned that there was a \$2.5m loan. Is that company repaying that loan on monthly or six-monthly repayments? Can you give more detail in regard to that?

Ms FYLES: The Local Jobs Fund is a way in which we can expand and diversify our economy. It is a loan, but it is to businesses that might not be able to get the equity or loan through normal business channels. It goes through a robust test before it is approved.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I do not have the exact repayment arrangements to hand now.

Mr MALEY: Can we put that on notice?

Ms FYLES: I think it is commercial-in-confidence, but we need people to understand that there is a process and due diligence that goes around this before loans are handed out. They are loans, so they are high risk, but ...

Mr MALEY: I just want to confirm that someone is paying the loan back. I do not need to know exact interest or see the loan document, but just to confirm it is being paid back and what the arrangement is in relation to that.

Ms FYLES: I will take the question on notice and we will provide what information we can.

Question on Notice No 5.11

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide detail in relation to the loan arrangements for the \$2.5m loan to that company, including any repayment schedules?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.11.

Mr YAN: You mentioned the G-111 was brought up and relocated from down south approximately six months ago. Has that plane flown yet?

Ms FYLES: No. They are doing the work on that and getting the CASA-approved versions of the aircraft based on that design. The process is under way.

Mr YAN: Do we have a time line on when that plane might fly?

Ms FYLES: I am sure that AAI would love to host both of you at the hangar. This is an awesome project for the Territory, and we love to see the opposition being supportive. It is such a great story of a refugee who came to Australia and a business partnership. It is a real opportunity for the Territory. I suggest you visit the hangar, see the plane, get the briefing, and I am happy to receive written questions on this. It is great.

Mr YAN: We do not know when the plane will possibly fly.

Ms FYLES: Through the Local Jobs Fund we provide loans to these businesses that might not be able to get the equity or financial loans through normal markets because of the higher risk. There are also opportunities there, but it goes through a due diligence process. In regard to the individual projects, I promise you that you will know when that plane flies, because I will be plane-spotting for it.

I encourage you both to visit the hangar. I know they would be more than happy to host you.

Mr MALEY: A final question about the money loaned to that company. What are the arrangements to get that money back if it falls over or fails?

Ms FYLES: Jason can explain the Local Jobs Fund process. It goes through a robust process before it is approved. They are not all approved. They may come into Cabinet and we may say ...

Mr MALEY: This one obviously has been approved.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr MALEY: Sea Dragon must have been approved for \$70m. Lots of projects have been approved that have fallen over. For this project, what arrangements do you have in place to secure taxpayers' money if this company fails?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: With all Local Jobs Fund processes, we do a number of different checks and balances. For example, we always make sure that we are investing alongside other investors, so it is

a co-funded process for Local Jobs Fund. We take security in relation to the company assets and so forth. The exact nature of security for this project I do not have at hand ...

Mr MALEY: Can you take that on notice?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: It is probably confidential, but I can provide what we can. The reality is from a Local Jobs Fund perspective, we always make sure the Territory government has appropriate measures in place for recovery.

Mr MALEY: That will only work for some projects like the water bottle thing. I am wondering whether you can take this on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.12

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you please outline the arrangements in which you secure taxpayers' money if this venture or company fails? How will the money be paid back?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. We will provide an update on the process with Local Jobs Fund and whatever we can.

Mr MALEY: I want it specific to this \$2.5m loan plus the \$1.5m equity that you have purchased in that company.

Ms FYLES: We will provide what we can within commercial-in-confidence, yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.12.

Mr YAN: I have a final question on the AAI project. You mentioned the loans have been high risk. A project fell over on the Central Coast when it had \$2.8m raised. What has specifically changed since that point in time, apart from our Northern Territory Government investment into this project?

Ms FYLES: I suggest that is a question for AAI, as the proponents.

Mr MALEY: Would that not be a question of the due diligence you had when you were to invest more money? Would you not say in the first instance, 'Why did you fail last time?' Would that not be a pretty standard first question? I would ask it.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I do not believe it failed. The arrangements they were putting in place with another government were not proceeding at the pace they wanted.

Mr MALEY: Can you take that question on notice?

Ms FYLES: No, we just answered the question.

Mr YAN: I have some more for the same output on major projects.

I want to touch on some of the major projects that have been announced lately, particularly the involvement of the former Chief Minister Mr Gunner in his role with Fortescue Future Industries. How many meetings have you had with Mr Gunner in that role in the past year, either formally or informally?

Ms FYLES: I have had none. I can hand on heart say I have not spoken to the former Chief Minister about his new job, let alone any of the work he undertakes.

Mr YAN: How are you managing the conflict with the former Chief Minister Mr Gunner, in accordance with the ICAC Act and the ministerial code of conduct?

Ms FYLES: That is a very important question. As a Cabinet, we have strong processes in place; conflicts are declared. We recently had the ICAC present to us. There is a great video I encourage anyone watching to

see, which talks about conflicts, particularly in a place like the Territory, where we might be in this room and undertaking roles and we will see each other at basketball or soccer on the weekend. It is a tricky space in a small community. Conflicts are declared and managed.

As I said, I have not had any conversations with the former Chief Minister about that. I have had the odd text message from him. It is something we take very seriously.

Mr YAN: Who in Cabinet has Mr Gunner been meeting with about these major projects?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for each Cabinet minister. From my perspective, I have not met with him about this. I assume that the department would be working with the organisation he works for on the projects—both the Middle Arm through DIPL and Major Projects. I have not met with him on it.

Mr YAN: Are you unable to answer which Cabinet ministers may have met with Mr Gunner in relation to major projects?

Ms FYLES: I note that this was asked of one of my colleagues last week and they had not met with him on it, but I suggest you ask each individual minister. It conflicts. It is about managing that conflict and what is the actual conflict. It is important to understand that. As the Chief Minister and first minister in Cabinet I make my team aware of that and, as I just pointed to, have done recent work around it.

Mr YAN: Fortescue Future Industries was put on the shortlist of Middle Arm proponents on 7 June this year. Did Mr Gunner lobby for this shortlisting to your knowledge?

Ms FYLES: He did not lobby me. Jason can respond on his behalf.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: No, former Chief Minister Michael Gunner, who is now working for Fortescue Future Industries, did not lobby for that.

Mr YAN: Did Mr Gunner in his role with Fortescue Future Industries have any specific role in negotiations on the Middle Arm project with it moving forward as a major project?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: A point to clarify is that it is not currently a major project. Major projects go through a Cabinet process. It is yet to go through that process. The shortlisting and the negotiation of the 'do not deal' arrangements were handled by the Land Development Corporation with support from my office.

Mr MALEY: Is Middle Arm not a major project? Is that what you just said?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Middle Arm has not been declared a major project. We imagine that the projects to be based in Middle Arm will eventually become major projects, but are not formally announced as such yet.

Mr YAN: I asked the question incorrectly. Has Mr Gunner been in negotiations with you or the Land Development Corporation as part of the future for the Middle Arm project?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I can confirm that Mr Gunner and his team were definitely involved in discussions around the arrangements for Middle Arm.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You said that you were given some sort of in-service on conflict of interest by the ICAC Commissioner, is that ...

Ms FYLES: Yes. As the ICAC was talking about this morning, education is important. It is timely from time to time to be updated about the matters and ensuring that people are refreshed. We have processes for how we would declare conflicts and how they are managed within the Cabinet team and the Caucus team. He has done that new video. It is important for everyone. I remember we had sessions in the parliament with the previous ICAC, do you remember that? He came in, we all sat at our Chamber desks and he ran through a presentation with us. I will not do you in that you missed class that day!

Mrs LAMBLEY: Was it in the Chamber?

Ms FYLES: Yes, we were in the Chamber. It is going back a few years now.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Was that with Cabinet or your wing?

Ms FYLES: No. With the whole of the parliament.

Mrs LAMBLEY: No, sorry, the conflict of interest in-service the ICAC Commissioner gave you recently, was that ...

Ms FYLES: The briefing that we had recently was with the Cabinet team. It is important to be aware of how you would manage it and what is a conflict. You can always keep educating yourself.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not think I have been availed of that in-service.

Ms FYLES: He offered this morning. He was talking about his video.

Mrs LAMBLEY: He did not offer to do an in-service with it. I am interested ...

Ms FYLES: I am sure he is listening.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Was the opposition offered an in-service on conflicts of interest?

Mr MALEY: I am aware of the video that he put out. I have watched that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Okay.

Mr GUYULA: How much funding has been provided by the NT Government for major, significant and government-facilitated projects in the Mulka electorate since 2016? What are the projects that have received this funding or in-kind funding or will receive in this budget?

Ms FYLES: The Equatorial Launch Australia, the rockets, has been the only project in your electorate.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise where to ask about the provision of an independent researcher for the Independent members of parliament?

Ms FYLES: It is under Output 15.1, Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition.

Mr GUYULA: Could you advise whether an independent researcher has been budgeted? Your last correspondence stated that it was something that would be revealed in the May budget.

Ms FYLES: It is not the correct output. I will ensure that I have a response for you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I do not know whether it is in this output group. The Chief Minister recently had a meeting with the Chinese Ambassador to Australia. Did you talk about the 99-year lease of the Darwin Port with the ambassador?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure which output that would be under. I am looking for an appropriate output. I did not mention it in my opening statement, but I am happy to respond.

As Chief Minister, I and the Deputy Chief Minister meet with a number of consuls-general and ambassadors. I had a high-level meeting with the Ambassador from China. I sought advice before the meeting and it was a high-level introductory meeting. We did not delve into specifics. I would suggest that negotiating foreign policy is a matter for the Australian Government. I think I have enough in the Territory.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I remember how scathing and critical your government was of the former Giles CLP government signing off on the 99-year lease of the Darwin Port with the Chinese company. I thought that may have been the obvious place to start any discussions with the Chinese.

Ms FYLES: I absolutely say on the record that the CLP should never have sold our port and spent the money. That was a decision under that government and that is what happens; we have a democracy and we have a government. People live with that government for a time and we live with the consequences of its decisions post that.

Mr YAN: A point of order, Mr Chair! I would like to correct the record. The CLP did not sell the port; it is being leased.

Mr MALEY: I understand Labor spent the money.

Ms FYLES: To reiterate, the Member for Namatjira said the CLP did not sell the port. It effectively sold the port in that 99-year lease, but I can assure you, Member for Araluen, it was a high-level, polite, diplomatic visit from the Chinese Ambassador.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You mentioned the consequences. Have there been any consequences of the 99-year lease of the Darwin Port with the Chinese?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure where that output would be, but we are not there yet. I took liberty to answer your question ...

Mrs LAMBLEY: You just mentioned consequences.

Ms FYLES: We have a public asset that is no longer in the hands of the government and public. We cannot control how it is utilised. That, to me, is a consequence and I am sure others would add more commentary.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How is that realised by the government at the moment?

Ms FYLES: It is important to have public assets under the control of the government. It can utilise them to support the jurisdiction. That did not happen when our port was 99-year leased. I do not want to upset the Member for Namatjira by saying he sold it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Is that a problem for you as the Chief Minister at the moment?

Ms FYLES: I think I answered that.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I am extrapolating on what you have opened up.

Mr CHAIR: It is not in the budget.

Mr GUYULA: You might want this question asked somewhere else, but I will give it a go.

Could you advise where I should ask a question on cost-of-living subsidies? Firstly, how will the residents and small businesses of Nhulunbuy be assisted with cost-of-living increases? Secondly, the Queensland Government subsidises flights for many remote communities. What is the government doing to address the expensive cost of remote flights in the NT?

Ms FYLES: That would have been a question for the minister for aviation strategy, Nicole Manison. I am sure you could get a briefing or ask a written question.

Mr YAN: Last week when we were speaking to Minister Manison, she gave us a list of major projects. She mentioned Sea Dragon still in that list of major projects. Can you confirm whether Sea Dragon is on your list of major projects? How many major projects do we have currently under way?

Ms FYLES: I will hand to the Major Projects Commissioner.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: Yes, I can confirm that Project Sea Dragon is still a major project. There are 14 major projects. Of interest, there is a recent update by the CEO for Project Sea Dragon on the ASX of 14 June, which outlines a range of things it has been doing to make sure this project can be brought to fruition.

Mr YAN: Project Sea Dragon has effectively, by all accounts, ceased. It is not looking to pursue it and we still have it on our list of major projects. Why is that so?

Ms FYLES: I do not think that is correct. Jason will comment further.

Mr YAN: I am happy to get advice on that one.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: As I mentioned a second ago, the ASX release on 14 June outlined exactly what the company is doing in relation to its project. It has been working very hard since the previous CEO's review of the project in 2022, including making sure that its offtake stayed on board and keeping in touch with its financiers. It has been overseas to investigate pond sizes and confirm the suitability of 10-hectare ponds.

Some of that it could not do because of COVID. It has been engaging with its financiers and funders and are actively working up a business plan and business model for its project right now. We are excited to receive that as soon as it is ready.

Mr MALEY: Can you tell us what was the last major project added to that list and what year that was done?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I am sure I can.

Ms FYLES: Do you want to ask a few more questions and we can try to find it, or we can take it on notice? I do not mind.

Mr MALEY: We will ask a few more questions. If you have the information there, we will wait.

Ms FYLES: Yes, we will try to get it to you.

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I do not have the dates for their additions, but the last three projects to be added to the list included Provaris Energy with its Tiwi hydrogen project, the Desert Bloom project and HyperOne.

Mr MALEY: Can you explain what that Tiwi H2 project is?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: The Tiwi hydrogen project is essentially a solar and hydrogen production project, designed from sunshine to use electrolysis to create hydrogen and ship that hydrogen to markets to our north.

Mr MALEY: Was that in the last financial year?

Mr SCHOOLMEESTER: I am not sure.

Mr MALEY: Can we take that on notice?

Question on Notice No 5.13

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you please provide a time line of the dates when the 14 major projects were added to the list?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.13.

Mr YAN: Is Seafarms still in voluntary administration, even though we are seeing some movement on the ASX?

Ms FYLES: I am advised that it is out of administration.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes questions on Output Group 13.0. I would like to thank those officials who sat through this morning.

OUTPUT GROUP 14.0 – DARWIN WATERFRONT CORPORATION **Output 14.1 – Darwin Waterfront Corporation**

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider questions on Output Group 14.0, Output 14.1, Darwin Waterfront Corporation.

Ms FYLES: I welcome Alastair Shields, Chief Executive Officer of the Darwin Waterfront Corporation, and Sam Burke, General Manager.

Mr CHAIR: Hello, and welcome. There are myriad questions to be asked.

Mr YAN: I have a specific question about the Darwin Waterfront Corporation. You announced a new master plan for the Waterfront Precinct, with three distinct precincts referred to as central, southern and northern. The Darwin Waterfront Corporation continues to work with the Northern Territory Government in a bid for \$200m in federal government funding to turn this vision into a reality for Darwin, commencing with the central precinct. Is there an update on this process?

Ms FYLES: It is an exciting project. I have been briefed by the team, and I will ask them to provide an update to the Estimates Committee on this wonderful vision.

Mr SHIELDS: Yes, we think it is an exciting master plan, and we continue to work on it. As the Chief Minister said, we recently briefed her on where things are at with the project. One of the elements of the project that is under way is the NT Government in conjunction with the corporation has sought bids for a hotel to be built at the back of the Convention Centre. We think that is an important project that will kick off this exciting master plan.

We continue to work on the middle elements of the master plan, particularly the wave pool. We have looked at some of the developments with similar projects in Australia and overseas, and we think we have a partner to work with to further develop that project. We continue to work on the material we need to provide the right funding approach to the Commonwealth.

Recently we have thought about packaging it in different ways, using the potentially undeveloped parts of the Waterfront to maybe leverage some funding for the other elements through things like real estate developments, so we continue to work on it.

Mr YAN: Do we have a time line when we may see commencement on some of these projects, either the central, northern or southern?

Ms FYLES: The hotel is 2026, as I understand. The rest of the project, as was just outlined, we are working through the aspects of it. It is considerable outlay, but it would add to liveability and boost tourism. For all the naysayers nearly 20 years ago, the Waterfront Precinct has added to the Top End for locals and visitors alike. It has provided corporate space for companies and businesses. It has space for locals to live and enjoy, and locals and visitors can attend activities and restaurants there. It is a great precinct. The hotel is going through its process, and we envisage it will be opened by 2026. We are working on the next stages of the Waterfront Precinct area.

Mr YAN: Do we have any bids to date for that hotel?

Ms FYLES: There have been multiple bids and it is going through due diligence and processes, but we expect to be able to announce details soon. You can read it in our press release.

Mr YAN: How soon, minister? We will all be waiting with bated breath.

Ms FYLES: I anticipate in the coming weeks, but we need to make sure it goes through due diligence processes. Sometimes things pop up at the last minute as we know.

Mr YAN: That is all my questions for the Waterfront Corporation. I am being nice this year.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. It is greatly appreciated. I understand a lot of prep goes into sitting before the Estimates Committee.

That concludes Output Group 14.0. We will wait for the officials to come back and take a seat.

OUTPUT GROUP 15.0 – GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Output 15.1 – Support to Ministers and Leader of the Opposition

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back everyone and thank you for waiting. I will hand the call to the Member for Namatjira or the Member for Nelson for any questions on Output Group 15.0.

Mr YAN: What was the total hospitality budget over the last financial year for the Office of the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: I do not have a breakdown of hospitality. I may need to take it on notice.

Mr YAN: I will probably add by region, too.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.14

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: What was the total hospitality spend over the last financial year for the Office of the Chief Minister, broken down by region?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.14.

Mr YAN: For your office, including all ministerial officers and fifth floor staffers, how many ECOs are there?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to get you a specific number on notice, but I would estimate about a dozen. Each minister has a chief of staff, usually on an ECO contract.

Mr YAN: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.15

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: For the Office of the Chief Minister, including all ministerial officers and fifth floor staffers, how many ECOs are there, including the sublevels of 1 through 3?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.15.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Mr Chair, I have just had a complaint from a member of the public about you clicking your pen.

Mr CHAIR: I will try not to click my pen or my knuckles!

Mrs LAMBLEY: I had someone text me asking the Chair to stop clicking his pen.

Mr CHAIR: I will get a normal biro with no clicker.

Member for Namatjira, continue.

Mr YAN: Has there been any increase in security measures for the Office of the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: The Legislative Assembly looks after the members of parliament, but I am advised that there has been no increase in security measures.

Mr YAN: Have there been any security upgrades at your private residence since you have taken on the role of Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: Yes, I have had a security audit. I encourage all members of parliament to have a security audit, whether government, opposition or Independent. Unfortunately, on the left and right we see extremist-type behaviour. We live in a democracy. The wonderful thing is that we can come in here and debate heavily and,

as the Member for Araluen often tells me, disagree. At the end of the day, we are all Territorians. Unfortunately there have been tragic incidents overseas that we hope to never see here. It is important that everyone checks their personal security. The Speaker recently attended a conference and came back talking about security.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide the cost of the security upgrades for your private residence?

Ms FYLES: I do not have them, but I am sure we can get them to you, as well as for other ministers and the Leader of the Opposition. I am not sure whether she has had any. Everyone is entitled, whether it is through Legies or ...

Mr YAN: I might take that on notice for all ministers.

Question on Notice No 5.16

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: What has been the cost for security upgrades to ministers' and MLAs' private residences in the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.16.

Mr YAN: How many community engagement officers are now employed within the Office of the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: I think there are three.

Mr YAN: Do you know their classifications?

Ms FYLES: No.

Question on Notice No 5.17

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide the level of the community engagement officers employed within the Office of the Chief Minister?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.17.

Mr YAN: Are those officers engaging with specific areas of our community? If so, which parts of our community and which groups?

Ms FYLES: Yes, they assist within different regions.

Mr YAN: Do we know the regions?

Ms FYLES: Across the Territory, but we have allocated them nominally a region to look after, but they may go outside the region.

Mr YAN: Those regions are?

Ms FYLES: We will provide that with the breakdown of classifications.

Mr YAN: You will provide those regions?

Ms FYLES: It helps us as we are working through our role, if we have nominally a contact person for that area, but they may look after something in another area. There are five regions but three or so people.

Mr YAN: What groups are they engaging with?

Ms FYLES: I will provide a job description.

Mr YAN: You will provide the regions where they are working, and I would also like to know whether they work with specific community members and groups.

Ms FYLES: The Leader of the Opposition has staff, and we do not necessarily know exactly what role they undertake or the different community groups. I will start with providing a job description and a breakdown of numbers.

Mr YAN: How many media or communication officers are now employed within the Office of the Chief Minister?

Ms FYLES: Each minister generally has a media adviser and I have two, so about a dozen.

Mr YAN: Can we have a specific number?

Ms FYLES: I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.18

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many media or communication officers are now employed within the Office of the Chief Minister, and could I have a breakdown of their levels?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.18.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Earlier you acknowledged that you have your own social media person and said that the Opposition Leader probably has one too. Is that different from the press secretary position? Is it separate?

Ms FYLES: I have someone who helps with social media and someone who helps with mainstream media, yes.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many of those positions do you have on level five solely doing social media?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take that on notice. I have one person.

Question on Notice No 5.19

Mr CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many social media positions are there on level five?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 5.19.

Mrs LAMBLEY: I have a question on behalf of me and the Member for Mulka. In the last term of parliament the Independent members were blessed with having research officers who assisted them with their parliamentary work. That has not been the case since the beginning of this term, and we have sadly missed that support. We now do not have any support. Several of the Independent members use their electorate officers to support them while they are in parliament, but I do not have that luxury. I am wondering—this question has been asked many times—what is your intention regarding that. Will you resource the Independent members with their parliamentary work?

Ms FYLES: We approved the Department of the Legislative Assembly to put forward a budget submission, which we have not received. That was fairly recently. It most likely will go to the midyear. As you know, the recommendation from Langoulant was that we look at the budget holistically. Each year we have the midyear budget. The advice I have is that the Department of the Legislative Assembly was going to put forward a submission. They were approved to put in a submission. Whether that gets granted is another question, but they were approved.

Mrs LAMBLEY: This is three years, minister that we have not had any assistance. Zip. Nothing.

Ms FYLES: It is a question for the Speaker, the Department of the Legislative Assembly, but we have approved it.

Mrs LAMBLEY: The Speaker may or may not put in a submission that you may or may not honour or fund?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mrs LAMBLEY: There is little hope of us getting any assistance during this parliamentary term.

Ms FYLES: There is a process there.

Mr CHAIR: We have the Speaker coming later this week, and he might be watching as well.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It does not really matter.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 15.1.

Output 15.2 – Support to the Administrator

No questions.

Output 15.3 – Government Services

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 15.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 16.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 16.1 – Corporate and Governance

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 16.0, Corporate and Shared Services, Output 16.1, Corporate and Governance. Are there any questions?

Mr YAN: What was the total spent settling the legal matters paying judgement and/or satisfying legal cost orders in the last financial year to 31 May 2023?

Ms FYLES: I have a global figure of \$939,000.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of how you get to that global figure? Was it legal fees? Was it paying out judgements?

Ms FYLES: I do not have that here, but I am happy to take that on notice if I can provide some information.

Question on Notice No 5.20

Mr CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you give a breakdown of how the \$939,000 was made up?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.20.

Mr YAN: What was the total cost of marketing and media for the agency?

Ms FYLES: Can I take the question on notice? We do not have that breakdown.

Question on Notice No 5.21

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: What was the total cost of marketing and media for the agency for the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.21.

Mr YAN: You may have to take this on notice as well. What were the major campaigns, initial costs and any expected ongoing costs from those campaigns?

Question on Notice No 5.22

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please state the question for the record.

Mr YAN: What were the major campaigns, initial costs and any expected ongoing costs from those campaigns?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.22.

Mr YAN: How many complaints were received in 2022–23 about contracts awarded by your agency?

Ms FYLES: They want to say none, but they will take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.23

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many complaints were received in 2022–23 about contracts awarded by your agency?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.23.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 16.1.

Output 16.2 – Shared Services Received

No questions.

Output 16.3 – Shared Services Provided

No questions.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 16.0 and the output groups relating to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet.

On behalf of the committee I thank all the officers for attending today. I appreciate that a lot of work goes into this. You do not necessarily get a chance to answer those questions relating to what you have done.

The committee suspended.

LAND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr CHAIR: Welcome back, everyone. Chief Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Major Projects to introduce the officials accompanying you and make an opening statement, if you would like, regarding the Land Development Corporation.

Ms FYLES: I have Mr Tony Stubbin, Chief Executive Officer of the Land Development Corporation, and Carly Beh, Chief Financial Officer. I will not make a statement. I am not sure whether they will make a short statement or go straight to questions.

Mr YAN: I thank the people here today representing the Land Development Corporation. What exactly is the \$1.8m allocation in the budget on BP3 page 81 for the Fannie Bay development?

Ms FYLES: It is not a finalised matter, but Tony is able to provide you some brief information.

Mr STUBBIN: LDC owns a 1.4-hectare parcel of land in Waratah Crescent directly adjacent to the aged-care facility. We are in the process of selling that land to the aged-care facility to enable it to expand. For the remaining 9,000 square metres we have lodged a development application to put some housing in that location. That is still subject to some of our business processes, but \$1.8m would be the partial cost of us doing that subdivision to install a cul-de-sac and allow some housing lots to be developed in that location.

Mr YAN: The target new residential lots created in 2023–24 are less than half for this year. Why is that the case when we are in desperate need of increased housing supply in the Territory, particularly in the Darwin/Palmerston area?

Ms FYLES: We work hard as a government to make sure that land release is coming forward and we do not oversupply the market. For people generally, their biggest investment is their home and they want stability. The work we have done on diversifying the economy is so that we can step away from the boom-and-bust cycle. I think everyone in this room can talk about when property prices crashed and then crept back up. We make sure we do land release in a manner that does not flood our market but provides available lots.

I am not sure whether Tony wants to add anything else about the work the Land Development Corporation is doing. We have plans for new subdivisions and new suburbs across the Territory, and they come online during different financial years.

Mr STUBBIN: The other point is that LDC is but one developer in the space. We are required to act in a competitively neutral manner, so flooding the market with product that is not commercial would not be consistent with competitive neutrality, and it would upset the private sector providers of land.

You will find that we have two products: the one you are familiar, in your electorate, Kilgariff Estate; and an estate we partner with, Urbex, in Zuccoli. Those numbers can go up and down. We had a very large year the year before in Zuccoli, because two releases appeared at either end of the financial year. We normally put one release per year, so you will get a reduction as a result of that. In both cases, we are trying to maintain product in the marketplace for people to buy. You will see that we are still producing land at Kilgariff.

Mr YAN: In effect, the premise of that decrease was last year there were two releases in one financial year.

Mr STUBBIN: Correct.

Mr YAN: There is only one projected, which shows that reduction in numbers.

Mr STUBBIN: Yes.

Mr YAN: I have a question on Kilgariff. How many new home builds will be facilitated by the completion of stage 2B of the Kilgariff Estate project? Does the \$1.9m in funding for 2023–24 signal that the stage will be finished this year, given that \$9m was earmarked last year?

Ms FYLES: Before I hand over to Tony, it was great to be at the official park opening at Kilgariff a few weeks ago. It was quite a windy day, but a great day, and it is a wonderful addition to the community of Kilgariff and Alice Springs. It was exciting to see the recreation area and a different space in that suburb. Tony is just finding the papers on specific numbers—or we might need to take it on notice.

Mr STUBBIN: No, it is all in my head, which is better than the paper. In regard to completion this year, we expect 2B to be completed around July/August, just missing this financial year. That will be 36 lots. Stage 2A, which is open at the moment, has a total of 52 lots, of which 20 are sold. I think four to six dwellings are being constructed.

Mr YAN: The Land Development Corporation budget for 2023–24 includes \$16m for the Marine Industry Park. Is this part of the ship lift project? That is on BP3, page 81.

Ms FYLES: I understand that is the land next door.

Mr YAN: What is proposed to be in this Marine Industry Park? Is that support to the ship lift project or businesses in support of the ship lift project? Will that land be made available?

Ms FYLES: I am happy for Tony to speak to that.

Mr STUBBIN: The Marine Industry Park in total is about 150 hectares of land at East Arm. The ship lift is at the extreme right-hand side, as I look at it, and the remaining land will be developed over time. The budget you mentioned was for the first stage of works, which will be some serviced lots directly adjacent to our existing common-user facility. We have a barge ramp and hardstand in there.

There will be a number of lots for companies that will be the users of the ship lift. We are talking to Defence, Defence industry players and private sector marine companies establishing their own sheds and facilities adjacent to and as close as possible to the ship lift. That will all happen over the next 18 months. Those lots will be ready for people to move in before the ship lift is up and running.

Mr YAN: I have a question on Zuccoli Village. The residential development income is forecast to decrease by over \$4m this year, and the budget papers indicate this is due to a decrease in expected sales in Zuccoli. With the lack of supply in the residential home market in the Territory, why are we expecting a decrease in land sales at Zuccoli? Should we not be seeing an increase?

Ms FYLES: The advice I have is that demand has eased there. We have seen higher interest rates and higher costs of construction for anyone who has tried to build or get a renovation. That is what has been forecast. It may change. It comes back to the opening comments I made on trying to provide balance between enough land and not flooding markets.

Mr YAN: If we are seeing an ease in investment, do you believe that the issues we are seeing in antisocial behaviour and crime are also having an effect on the shortfall in that investment and the decrease in sales and building?

Ms FYLES: I would not agree with that comment. We have 50% new—greenfield—and 50% infill projects of residential in the Territory. It is trying to find that balance. We have a number of projects that are planned or proposed. As we see final investment decisions made, we will see the need for residential land to come on as people move here. We have that forecasted 1% population growth. We would like to see 2%. That is our aim. We have the diversification in our economy, jobs here and real opportunity of jobs into the future.

Mr YAN: I spoke at length last week about the figures for population growth because it is 0.04% this year and projected to rise to 1%. To meet the benchmarks that you agreed to in the TERC report requires a growth of 2%. Whilst I agree that cost of living and high interest rates are having an effect on our economy, there is also a distinct lack of investment confidence, particularly regarding building and investment in the Territory, due to crime and antisocial behaviour. To say it is not a factor, I do not think is correct. It is a factor in people's decisions to move to, develop and invest in the Territory.

When were concerns first raised about the existence of Larrakia rock art in the Middle Arm area?

Ms FYLES: I will hand to Tony to provide some initial comments. I am happy to add some thoughts.

Mr STUBBIN: We have had longstanding understanding of that rock art being on land owned by LDC. We were given a clearance across all of our Middle Arm land by Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority many years ago, which included some consultation that was conducted with traditional owners at that time. AAPA engaged traditional owners and gave us a certificate. There are clear no-go zones in an area quite a way from where we are looking at developing on the southern side of Channel Island Road, but there were no restrictions on development north of Channel Island Road.

Mr YAN: I appreciate that. Is any further consultation being done with the TOs concerning that development in Middle Arm, even after you have explained the approvals from AAPA?

Mr STUBBIN: After the recent conversation in the media and publicly with Larrakia Development Corporation, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, which is looking at the broader Middle Arm region, is doing some broader consultation on that matter at this point.

Mr YAN: What assurances will you give the industry leaders considering investment in Middle Arm that they will not be thwarted at some point because the planning with traditional owners has not been done in the appropriate way? An example of this was the progression of the Aboriginal art gallery in Alice Springs. DIPL and the minister were instructed by the courts to go back, engage and consult properly with traditional owners about the development. What assurances will you provide to industry that this will not happen here?

Ms FYLES: As you heard, the AAPA certificates have been issued for the project area. Larrakia Development Corporation has been involved in the estate, such as naming some of the new roads. They are being included in the consultation on that project site.

Mr MALEY: Do you think that gives enough surety to businesspeople who may invest millions, noting what the Member for Namatjira said about the court orders to go back? Santos is another example of that.

Mr STUBBIN: My guess is that those companies are big enough, smart enough and serious enough to do their own consultation with traditional owners. That is mentioned frequently by proponents about the desire to engage with traditional owners. We can give them so much comfort from our perspective, but they may well want their own comfort to satisfy their own objectives.

Mr MALEY: You are saying you are doing the best you can, but that may not be enough.

Mr STUBBIN: They may want to do more, like consult on employment outcomes ...

Mr MALEY: Is your assurance enough for someone to buy, build and spend \$10m?

Mr STUBBIN: We are dealing with the assurances required under the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority act, which is the legislative obligation we have. Government, through DIPL, is doing some broader consultation and refresh of that process right now. I suspect the proponents will want to do their own consultations on artefacts, employment outcomes and perhaps a broader social benefit.

Mr MALEY: Would that be a classic example? If your organisation had done all the work, it would cut red tape and make it easier for people to do business. Would that not be common sense?

Mr STUBBIN: We share what we can with proponents.

Mr MALEY: You cannot guarantee the work you have done is enough?

Mr STUBBIN: No-one can guarantee—there are no certainties in this world. I can guarantee I have a certificate from the legislated body, but I cannot guarantee that there will not be a claim or concern that a private company has. They may, quite sensibly, take their own inquiries.

Mr CHAIR: To clarify, going forward on this line of questioning—Standing Order 109. I draw your attention to suborder (3)(c) about legal opinion.

Mr MALEY: Do you own any land at Gunn Point or is that NT Land Corporation?

Mr STUBBIN: NT Land Corporation, which is a different body.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of the Land Development Corporation business line. I thank Mr Stubbin and Ms Beh for coming in today. I know a lot of hard work goes into this, although you had only a small number of questions.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Health to introduce your officials and make an opening statement about the Department of Health if you so choose.

Ms FYLES: I introduce the officials from the Department of Health. They are Dr Marco Briceno, the Chief Executive Officer; and Deputy Chief Executive Officers, Adjunct Professor Joanne Norton and Mr David Braines-Mead. I will introduce other executives as we go along. Health being a big agency, if there are specific technical outputs, there are people here to provide additional advice.

During the reporting period, the Northern Territory transitioned from an exceptional and prolonged COVID-19 pandemic response into recovery from the global public health emergency. Although it seems a long time ago, it was within this financial year and the pandemic only ended a few months ago.

We are focusing on making sure that we have the best health service to care for Territorians and to ensure their wellbeing, along with making sure that we are building a financially and environmentally sustainable health service that can meet the ongoing challenges of timely access for patients and communities. We are also focused on a sustained skilled healthcare workforce during times of national shortages.

COVID-19 tested us in so many ways. It tested our health systems, community sector, ability to respond while continuing essential services and ability to work together to provide a coordinated whole-of-community response.

I will briefly summarise the massive effort by Territorians. As at 31 March 2023 there had been 105,000 recorded cases in the Northern Territory, with the high daily rate during 2022–23 being 1,162 cases per day.

As at June 2023 there have been over 107,000 cases, with approximately 20% of the cases now assessed as reinfections. The daily hospital demand peaked at 158 patients in June 2022. As of last week, tragically, there had been 100 recorded deaths. Of these patients, 70% were older than 60 years. Our thoughts are with their families.

The Northern Territory has successfully double vaccinated in excess of 95% of the population aged over 16 years. I encourage any Territorian to please get vaccinated, whether it is your second, third, fourth or fifth dose. There is vaccine available.

During the reporting period, services have evaluated key clinical priority from acute, subacute and primary healthcare to establish a platform for patient-centred engagement, particularly with a commitment to care being provided as close to home as possible.

The focus throughout 2022 and 2023 has supported a revised strategic plan for renal services, elective surgery, mental health, primary care, patient flow, ambulatory care, aged and allied healthcare.

To strengthen financial and system oversight and support the recovery effort along with making sure that we align with the Territory's budget strategy, the department has developed a remediation plan. This plan will progress improvements in financial and service delivery performance across the Northern Territory health services.

Recruiting specialist workforce is a significant challenge and remains an area of intense focus. These challenges are not unique to the Territory, with all jurisdictions similarly competing for staff. However, the challenges are exacerbated here, given our diverse regional and remote locations. The department has been working consistently to address the ongoing workforce shortages across primary and acute settings. We can speak to that in questioning the details.

We have put in place a number of general and targeted workforce strategies, including a comprehensive clinical recruitment campaign to fill positions that are hard to fill. There have been 114 critical clinical roles advertised, resulting in recruitment of 26 skilled health professionals from nursing, midwifery, medical specialists, rural generalists, allied health and dentistry.

With a view to growing our own workforce, NT Health has supported an additional six medical placements in the 2023 Flinders University NT Medical Program, which I am sure members of the committee are familiar with. We are also providing support for the establishment of Charles Darwin University Menzies School of Medicine.

We have the NT rural generalist training pathway, which was established to provide pre-vocational doctors with rural and remote primary healthcare rotation opportunities. We are also working to increase the number of graduate nursing and midwifery new-to-practice places, which is an increase of 50. NT Health has expanded the assistant in nursing and midwifery model, employing more than 50 local NT resident student nurses to support registered nurses and midwives in acute and primary care.

Funding has increased for the Allied Health Rural Generalist Pathway focused on early career pathways into rural and remote areas. We are also developing partnerships with education providers, which has seen an increase in Certificate III in Dental Assisting traineeship as part of our Training Our Own initiative. Six Aboriginal cadets have graduated from the NT Health Aboriginal cadetship program in a range of allied health professions, including psychology and speech pathology. We are also focused on Aboriginal health practitioners.

Our unwavering commitment to the health and wellbeing of Territorians supported by high-quality healthcare has been evidenced through the budget papers—\$2bn for Health is a major investment and supports the key priorities of the Department of Health.

The budget has been adjusted appropriately as a result of moving beyond the public health emergency. The budget delivers on our commitment to invest in the future, build sustainable health services that can effectively meet the growing healthcare needs of Territorians, and prioritise culturally appropriate, safe and effective care close to home.

I am excited that the budget has infrastructure improvements that are essential to creating better service provision for communities.

We have focused on renal services. As we know this continues to grow at a rapid rate in tandem with the growing rate of diabetes. The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Aboriginal people receiving dialysis and almost half of the Territory's Aboriginal population aged over 50 is experiencing chronic kidney disease.

The evaluation of the Chronic Conditions Prevention and Management Strategy 2010–2020 confirms persistent and significant challenges exist in addressing chronic conditions. A revised framework will build on the strength of earlier efforts and focus on preventing chronic conditions across the Territory.

This morning we spoke in detail about alcohol policy. The Department of Health provides services and works with NGO partners to provide drug and alcohol rehabilitation, residential rehabilitation services, counselling, community-based services, education and information activities.

Pathways to community control—during this financial year Warruwi Health Centre in West Arnhem was transitioned to Red Lily Health Board. Imanpa and Yulara health centres in Central Australia were transitioned to Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Danila Dilba is providing services in the Darwin youth facility, and Congress is providing in the Alice Springs youth facility. There will be further services transitioning to the Aboriginal medical organisations, our non-government partners.

In closing, climate change threatens the health and wellbeing of Territorians with multiple factors that will contribute to increased risk of infectious disease, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, asthma, allergies, mental illness, poor nutrition, injury, poisoning and mortality.

In direct response to the clear human health, environmental, ethical and economic need for urgent action on climate change, the Northern Territory Department of Health has appointed a Director of Sustainability Action. This position was established to facilitate urgent strategic and operational climate action. This includes strengthening relationships with key NT Government agencies to align policy and strategic effort on climate change priorities. Sustainable healthcare committees have been established in the regions.

I have updated the parliamentary Chamber and this committee in the past on some of those initiatives, but was excited to see this position appointed. Health is a big organisation and a big emitter, but lots can be done.

I am happy to take questions from the committee.

Mr YAN: Thank you for your opening statement, minister. I thank all the people from NT Health and the public servants for the work they have put into Estimates and for being here today.

You spoke about how we are coming out the end of COVID and the staffing pressures we have seen on all our hospitals and clinics. Effectively we are now in a competition for healthcare staff nationally. Would you say that the staffing pressures that we are facing in the Territory are contributing to the code yellows, particularly in Darwin and Palmerston hospitals?

Ms FYLES: From our perspective, we want to make sure that we have competitive EBAs. The medical officers EBA, the nurses and midwives EBA, the Aboriginal health practitioners and the dental officers enterprise agreements have all been negotiated and they are in varying stages, but we are really keen to see improved terms for our staff and to finalise the agreements.

As I alluded to in my opening speech, we are investing in infrastructure. We have a strong plan—the clinical services plan—across the Northern Territory and then will match the infrastructure with that. Infrastructure costs lots of dollars, particularly in Health, but we are doing the forward planning so that we know what we need to deliver and when. We are investing in not only the hospitals that we have, but also our remote primary clinics.

I will hand to Dr Marco to speak specifically on the point that you asked about the code yellows.

Dr BRICENO: The challenges with staffing certainly play a role in the way the whole ecosystem in Health operates. Some of the drivers of our increased demand in hospital services are a consequence of the last two or three years that we have been dealing with COVID where people engaged less with preventative activities in primary care. Also there was less focus or emphasis on elective activity in our hospitals and there is a lot of backlog activity coming back to our hospitals. We have an increased demand from a sick population who are now trying to access services.

The staff shortages that we are experiencing across the health system, particularly in primary healthcare in remote—on the NT Government side but also on the non-government side and in the mainstream primary healthcare space—certainly play a role in increasing demand into our hospitals, away from the natural area where this activity should be occurring in primary healthcare. Some of the staff challenges that we are facing also impact on the functionality of our hospitals and add to the pressure. In short, the staff shortages have contributed to the bed pressure that we are experiencing, but it is not the only factor.

Mr YAN: How many code yellows have we had from the end of last financial year to date?

Ms FYLES: Up to March, there have been three.

Mr YAN: You should be able to give me advice up to today. It is readily available.

Ms FYLES: There have been three to 30 March and two more since then. It is probably worth noting that in the last couple of code yellows elective surgery has not been deferred. The Top End Palmerston/Darwin hospitals have made a big effort to try to continue that, and that relates to the challenges with some of our staffing. Some specialties are difficult to recruit to—perioperative nursing and emergency nurses—so there are some areas that are particularly challenging. Marco can elaborate, but we have tried to work through. Even though we have been in a code yellow, which is part of the system response to ensure safe patient care, we are still providing elective surgeries.

Mr YAN: There have been effectively five code yellows in just on 12 months. What was the total number of days for the five code yellows? You may have to take that on notice. Is the other code yellow that was announced last week still in effect?

Ms FYLES: Code yellow is a hospital emergency response to manage an internal incident that threatens to overwhelm or disrupt the hospital.

Mr YAN: I know what it is.

Ms FYLES: I am responding.

Mr YAN: I am after the total number of days.

Ms FYLES: Yes, I am getting there. This includes bed capacity. It might be an IT issue.

I thought I could add it up quickly, but I will need to take that on notice in terms of the days.

Question on Notice No 5.24

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: Of the five code yellows in the last 12 months, what has been the total number of days that our hospitals have been under code yellow?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. They are frantically calculating and if we get it during this, we will come back.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.24.

Mr YAN: How many elective surgeries were delayed or cancelled as a result of each code yellow? You may need to take that on notice as well.

Ms FYLES: This calendar year we have not deferred any elective surgery. It was for the code yellows last year that elected surgery would have been deferred. We will take that on notice and get you a figure.

Mr YAN: That was in the last part of the first half of this financial year.

Ms FYLES: Correct, yes.

Mr YAN: It will still be for the entire reporting period, even though they have not been delayed.

Ms FYLES: Yes. That has been a change.

Question on Notice No 5.25

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: In the last 12 months, how many surgeries were delayed or cancelled as a result of the code yellows?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.25.

Mr YAN: Did the Territory-wide pause in elective surgeries continue into this reporting period?

Ms FYLES: Is that in this reporting period?

Mr YAN: No. In the previous reporting period we had a Territory-wide pause in elective surgeries during COVID. Did that pause in elective surgeries continue into this reporting period?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mr MALEY: Earlier you mentioned negotiating the EBAs. Can you explain to the committee the cost of the pay freeze for the time that was imposed to now? How much has it cost the government in relation to getting the new EBA?

Ms FYLES: It did not impact the four health ones. The nurses did a three-year plus one-year when they signed their previous EBA, so they just kept rolling through. It expired in August last year. For the medical officers I am not sure when it expired, but a formal offer has been made.

We have not had any industrial impact. It would be fair to say we have been able to negotiate with their representatives in good faith and we are hopeful they will all be formalised soon. We have been working through all the requests in the health space and they have been quite varied through the disciplines.

Mr YAN: Have any other hospitals apart from RDH and Palmerston Regional Hospital experienced a code yellow or any other incident this financial year?

Ms FYLES: I was getting to that point. There were eight code yellows in total. Four were related to bed ...

Mr YAN: Sorry, was it five or eight?

Ms FYLES: Five until 30 March.

Mr YAN: Is that five until 30 March and three since 30 March?

Ms FYLES: Yes. Four were related to bed capacity.

Mr MALEY: That is not what you said earlier. I am sure you said ...

Ms FYLES: Did I say five and two?

Mr YAN: I wrote it down. It was three until March and two since.

Mr MALEY: Yes, five in total. Now you are saying it is eight in total.

Ms FYLES: Some are due to bed pressure and sometimes a code yellow can be caused because of a telecommunications outage. That goes back to what I was saying about it being an emergency response when there is an incident that threatens to overwhelm or disrupt a hospital.

I will get those exact figures for you and come back to it.

Mr YAN: Yes, because you have advised us there were three until March and two since. It is now five until March and three since.

Ms FYLES: I will get clarity because I think there is some confusion. Sometimes they are due to bed pressures and sometimes they are due to ...

Mr MALEY: Just the code yellows.

Mr YAN: Yes. I am not particularly worried about the cause.

Ms FYLES: It is part of a system. You would have been in hospital and will have heard a code blue, code black or code brown called. When we had the warehouse fire, that was why that was called. It is part of the system to respond so that we are not overwhelmed and can keep delivering patient care.

Mr YAN: Apart from the two hospitals up here, has there not been anything called for any other hospitals across the Territory?

Ms FYLES: Katherine had one and Nhulunbuy had one. Nhulunbuy was telecommunications and Katherine was bed pressure. I will get that breakdown. I have asked the department to ensure that a press release goes out, which did not happen until a few years ago. We will provide a breakdown of code yellows and which hospital.

I will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.26

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many code yellows have there been at our hospitals this financial year? My previous question was how many days they had been in force. Could that be updated to include a change in numbers, if there have been any?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.26.

Mr YAN: The reason I asked about other hospitals was I specifically know that Alice Springs Hospital has been under extreme staffing pressures for quite some time, with up to 134 shortages of nurses—I think that is right, Member for Araluen. To date, there has not been a code called for Alice Springs Hospital. Are there different reporting parameters because of specific management practices that a code yellow has not been called, knowing the staffing and bed pressures it has been under?

Ms FYLES: I will ask Angela Brannelly to come to the table. Angela is back to her position at Big Rivers, but for the last six months she has been in Alice Springs in Central Australia.

Ms BRANNELLY: Could you please repeat the question?

Mr YAN: The question was about code yellows. There have been a number at our Top End hospitals, including Katherine. Some have been due to staffing and bed shortages.

Alice Springs specifically has been under extreme pressure, with staffing up to 134 nurses short in Alice Springs Hospital. Are there different requirements for the calling of code yellows, different reporting requirements or is it down to different management that Alice Springs has not yet had a code yellow called due to staffing pressures?

Ms BRANNELLY: We have the same model on calling code yellows throughout the Northern Territory. With Alice Springs Hospital, it relates to the management of the staffing challenges and the bed capacity at the hospital. We flex the beds up and down depending on the staffing available to ensure that we are providing safe care to the patients of Alice Springs. We have not been required to call a code yellow for Alice Springs Hospital during the reporting period.

Mr YAN: If Alice Springs is able to manage by flexing and putting in different practices, why have Darwin or Palmerston Regional Hospital not been able to achieve the same results?

Ms FYLES: One factor is long-stay patients. In Alice Springs—this is a date in time, but will give you an indication—on 11 April there were six NDIS and one aged-care patient in ASH. In the Top End there were 46 aged-care, one NDIS and 26 patients awaiting assessment for referral to aged-care facilities. You can see that difference.

We are building those aged-care beds and working the Commonwealth Government. We often will be provisionally allocated aged-care beds and when it comes time to build them, it is such a thin market the provider will pull out. That is why we do not see more aged-care beds coming into the Territory.

The other factor is Royal Darwin Hospital/PRH is tertiary—it has a bigger catchment area, people will be referred from there, so they cannot just say no to patients.

Dr BRICENO: As I mentioned before the staffing shortages are a contributing factor and not the only one in the calling of a code yellow. The main challenge we face in Royal Darwin Hospital is the number of beds available to treat the demand of patients coming through our door from not only the greater Darwin area but also across the Top End, including East Arnhem and Big Rivers. Being the only tertiary facility in the Territory, Royal Darwin also takes patients from Central Australia and the Barkly. The pressures we are facing in regard to beds, in addition to the staffing, is what determines the colour of the code for bed pressure purposes.

Mr MALEY: You are saying that one of the main differences between Alice Springs and Darwin is that Darwin has more long-term, aged-care residents in the hospital, when Alice Springs has only small numbers. How much money do you get federally to deal with aged care? I thought that was federal—you get money and manage on their behalf. Is that how it works?

Ms FYLES: It is more that these people have nowhere to go. We work hard with the nursing homes and the community-based providers. We try to provide supports to families so that people can stay in the home, but often there will not be somewhere for them to be discharged to. That is the complexity.

Mr MALEY: Can you outline the federal budget you received to manage aged care?

Ms FYLES: We put in a bid for aged-care beds. We will be like a conduit. There has been an expression of interest to build, own, operate or partner with us for 60 aged-care beds—we think at Palmerston but we are open—and that has closed recently. A number of providers put in EOIs, and we are working through that. That will put 60 aged-care beds into the Territory that are funded by the Commonwealth. We may provide some land or some building; that is being worked through.

I think your question is specifically to aged-care people who are in hospital. I will ask Marco or David to talk through that funding.

Dr BRICENO: The funding we receive for aged care is covering multiple facets. There is some funding that comes to the community-based service where we provide assistance to patients with aged-care needs that do not need to be in residential or need assessments and support.

Mr MALEY: Can we relate to residential? You are right; it is quite broad.

Dr BRICENO: When we talk about residential, if those patients are in our hospitals and cannot be discharged, under activity-based funding we receive some contributions from the Commonwealth.

Mr MALEY: How much?

Dr BRICENO: It is a small percentage because those patients will move to something we call maintenance care. Maybe David can give you the specifics of how much we get per patient. It does not really cover the cost of having those patients in our hospital.

More importantly, the impact that it has on our services is not the funding, but the availability to use those beds for acute care, which is what we need.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us an idea of what the funding is per person?

We can move on; we are all right with that.

Mr YAN: During code yellows, do you buy in services from Darwin Private Hospital to ease that pressure?

Ms FYLES: We buy in services not only when there is a code yellow. We could buy in services to help us with our bed demand pressures. Some of us would have private health insurance; you can go to the public hospital and transfer to the private. Sometimes the private hospital cannot accept those patients or if someone is just in there for a short period, it is not really worth shifting them from the public to the private to

then be discharged. That can be one of the complexities with a code yellow. We will work with Darwin Private for bed buy, which is how we refer to it, and we acknowledge it as a key partner in delivering healthcare.

Mr YAN: Would you have a breakdown of costs incurred for buying the services from Darwin Private Hospital during those code yellows?

Ms FYLES: We will get you some figures. Do you want it just during code yellows or during other times also?

Mr YAN: Just during code yellows, thanks.

Ms FYLES: From 1 July to 31 March the average bed days was 2.8 days. The total we paid from 1 July 2022 to 31 March 2023 to Darwin Private Hospital was \$800,000. The average cost per patient was \$3,828. That is the year figure, not just code yellows. We would get ABF back on that. That is what we have paid, but we would get funding back from the Commonwealth.

I can take the code yellow one on notice.

Mr YAN: It would be interesting to see what the code yellows are costing us to buy the services specifically from the private hospital.

Question on Notice No 5.27

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: Can you please provide a cost of the buying of services from Darwin Private Hospital during those instances of code yellow?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.27.

Mr YAN: You and the officials spoke about the increase in demand being Darwin being that tertiary-type hospital. Did we see an increase in demand for services at RDH when all the people were displaced from remote communities due to flooding because they could not access their local clinics and they were here?

Ms FYLES: During the evacuation, Katherine West worked exceptionally well. It brought its staff to Howard Springs to continue to provide primary healthcare for the community residents. The team are telling me that we did not have an increase in presentations to our hospitals. I am not saying that people did not go to hospital whilst they were here, but they could have potentially been taken to hospital even if they had been living in community. We had a strong continuation of their primary healthcare. I spoke with some of the Katherine West team because I had met them previously out there. It was pleasing to see them continue to provide that care.

Mr YAN: During that period did we manage or run a clinic at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: Correct. Katherine West did, with a bit of help from our teams.

Mr YAN: Apart from Katherine West, some of the other communities if they had clinics and those staff were displaced due to that flooding, did they also come to assist at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: Correct, yes.

Mr YAN: Was there a requirement to take staff from either Palmerston or Darwin to go and assist at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: I am not saying that we did not have some NT Health staff go out to CNR, but Katherine West basically relocated its services from those remote communities into Howard Springs to keep caring for people.

Mr YAN: How many staff did we have out there on a daily basis managing the clinic at Howard Springs?

Dr BRICENO: The few days when CNR was stood up and Katherine West Health Board staff were still in community or being evacuated, we provided some staffing. I do not have the numbers, but I can take it on notice. We provided for only the first few days. Once they were available and able to provide the services, they managed the entire operation with no need for extra Health personnel.

Mr YAN: I do not need to take that on notice, Dr Briceno. It is quite good that we were able to utilise staff from here and bring in the displaced staff from those areas to manage it.

How many staff were on duty at Howard Springs running that clinic on a daily basis?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question for Katherine West, but it certainly had multiple staff, from what I saw. We should acknowledge its efforts. It could have easily said, 'You are in town'. It was terrific in that continuation of care.

Mr YAN: Katherine West does not specifically sit under Health, does it? It is an ACCHO. One would hope it had a number of Aboriginal health workers and its entire staff out there.

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr YAN: Was there a requirement for reporting from Katherine West to Health on the work it was doing at Howard Springs?

Ms FYLES: No, it just managed the care. I am not sure whether you have been to Howard Springs. There is clinic space from when INPEX was there. It was able to take over that space and provide care.

Mr YAN: All right. Did we have to provide any mental health services at Howard Springs during that period?

Ms FYLES: Yes, I am told. I think it provided some and I am told there was some from the Department of Health. That would be a question for Minister Moss, where mental health sits.

Mr YAN: I am interested to know whether we provided mental health services out there as well.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Earlier this year, the ABC reported that in Alice Springs, for example, the hospital is running on only 50% of its usual nursing numbers and that the recruitment and retention of staff in Alice Springs Hospital was almost impossible, given the crime crisis. People were quoted as saying, 'We have had medical students being attacked'. A local doctor, GP Brent Pannell, was quoted as saying, 'We have had doctors being attacked. We have had places ransacked'. The story goes on, talking about the impact of crime—'I am trying to run an acute hospital service in Central Australia.'

I am wondering what is happening now. This was a few months ago, has anything improved? Is crime still impacting health services in Central Australia, like it was a few months ago?

Ms FYLES: I am not sure whether that quote was from the hospital or from a GP.

Mrs LAMBLEY: From Brent Pannell, a local GP of 37 years. There are quotes from various people. Cath Hatcher, NT Branch Secretary of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, said:

'Approximately 22 new graduates were supposed to start in January ...

'Half of them have pulled out because they're frightened of the level of violence they have seen on the media.'

There are quotes from all sorts of people who know what is happening in Central Australia. That is an ABC news story from 20 February, about three months ago. What is happening now?

Ms FYLES: I will ask Angela, who until recently was based there, to respond.

Ms BRANNELLY: It certainly was challenging, at the time. I know things are improving. As mentioned, the NT clinical recruitment campaign is helping us attract and retain staff. We are starting to see staff coming back to Alice Springs. We are not at our usual staffing numbers, but it is improving.

We have done a number of things to help staff be safe and help with their wellbeing. We put in a staff transport service to assist staff to get to and from work. We are helping staff with some wellness initiatives so that they can look after their mental health. We have put in strategies for managing the demand for healthcare that matches our staffing levels.

The staff in Alice Springs and the Central Australia region are dedicated, committed and passionate about providing healthcare to the people of Central Australia. We are getting there slowly. It is going to be small trickles, but it is improving.

Ms FYLES: There were extra security patrols at the campus put in place. I went to Alice Springs at about that time and did a staff forum. I not only met some of the clinical nurse managers of each of the wards, but we had a forum in a theatre. I heard from staff, as well as senior executives, so we could implement strategies to support them. We certainly listened to their concerns.

Mrs LAMBLEY: In March you are quoted as saying that there was a shortfall of more than 140 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives across Central Australia. What is the current figure?

Ms FYLES: That was out of the budgeted full-time equivalent of 670. As of 29 March, not far off what you just read, it was sitting at 111. I am not sure whether we have a more up to date figure, but I will find out.

Mrs LAMBLEY: You are quoted on 8 March in ABC News as saying more than 140 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives across Central Australia.

Ms FYLES: By the 29th—because they take the numbers at a certain pay point, so not a huge amount of time—it had gone down to 111. I am just seeing whether there is a more up-to-date figure than 30 March. There is not.

Mrs LAMBLEY: How many nurses have returned? Have any nurses left under this duress or concern for their safety and then come back? Nurses are a transient bunch, some of them.

Ms FYLES: I think there are staffing shortages Australia-wide, so it is not an ideal time to attract staff. We always have the seasonal issue, which you know well as a former Health minister, particularly in Central Australia. With the accommodation being built, it is one of our strategies to try to overcome the challenges we face. We will have some modern accommodation that people can easily move into for a few months while they work. We are trying to put in place strategies to overcome the challenges we always have. The issues we saw would have exacerbated the challenges to get staff in a tight labour market.

Mr YAN: With the accommodation that has been completed in Alice Springs, has the department started paying rent on that yet?

Ms FYLES: I think it is close to handover, but not yet.

Mr YAN: We have not been paying rent on that building as yet.

Ms FYLES: No. It goes from the builder to DIPL and then DIPL to Health. Health will fit it out. We are aiming to have residents there in July.

Mr YAN: Will it be open for residents in July?

Ms FYLES: Hopefully.

Mr YAN: Back to some questions about the services we provided at Howard Springs. I am aware that the government had to put in a mini sobering-up shelter at the front; is that correct?

Ms FYLES: When we established the facility—this would probably be a question for Territory Families under the welfare response—they built in a space for people to use if they came back to the premises intoxicated. I think that is what you are referring to. From the start of the facility, they had different spaces for different people's needs.

Mr YAN: Was the little sobering-up shelter managed by Territory Families and not Health?

Ms FYLES: It was not a sobering-up shelter. It was just a space for if someone returned because—unlike during the COVID response when people could not move around in there, let alone leave—people were free to move about.

Mr YAN: As part of the services provided to Howard Springs for those who were displaced, do we have any numbers on those requiring transport from Howard Springs to Palmerston or Darwin hospitals for treatment?

Ms FYLES: There were definitely people taken from CNR to hospital, such as dialysis patients or if someone had hurt themselves. I am happy to ask whether we have any specifics.

Mr MALEY: How much did that cost?

Ms FYLES: We would use St John, then St John would take them.

Mr YAN: I am going there next.

Ms FYLES: We do not have the specifics.

Mr YAN: You do not have the specific numbers, but do you have an idea on the cost of transport through St John from the CNR to either Palmerston or Darwin hospitals?

Dr BRICENO: The activity related to that will be within the contract that St John has to provide ambulance services to the area. We have not seen any request for extra funding to provide that service and have not received any notification that increased activity was putting pressure on the system.

Just to expand on the answer, because Katherine West Health Board was providing primary healthcare there, we were ensuring that patients residing at the CNR were accessing elective activity as well. They were attending outpatient clinics, elective surgery and medical imaging appointments, so there was transport of those patients. We have taxis or we transport to the hospital to access elective activity that otherwise would have been paid by patient travel from remote areas.

For the activity related to emergencies and ambulance services specifically, we have not received any data from St John that it put any extra pressure on its system.

Mr MALEY: What about the cost for the elective activity that you spoke about? Did the Department of Health pay for that or someone else?

Ms FYLES: If you were in Katherine or Daguragu, we would get you to the most appropriate hospital. It might have been that they would go to Katherine Hospital or Darwin. It depends. That is one of the complexities.

Mr MALEY: Are you saying that it could have been reduced because of the travel cost for someone from way out there to Darwin? Could you give us a ...

Ms FYLES: You have changed your tune; you are finding the silver lining in things.

Mr MALEY: No, I am not.

What was the actual cost to you to transport those people from Howard Springs? Is that a line item that you can give to us, or can you take that on notice?

Ms FYLES: It would be Territory Families because it had that bus.

Mr MALEY: Did you not say that you paid for that?

Dr BRICENO: We can take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.28

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: How much was the actual cost, if any, to the Department of Health to transport patients from the CNR to hospital or an elective-type activity?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.28.

Mr YAN: This is probably more of a global question. Were there any costs to Northern Territory Health to provide services during that period to CNR? Did you record those costs?

Dr BRICENO: I do not think there were any specific extra costs to Health for the delivery of services within that period. As we mentioned before, the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that deliver healthcare to those communities continued to do so in the different setting, and any activity that required a hospital was probably aligned to planned activity anyway. If there were any extra emergency presentations, all those people were lucky to be in town and close to an emergency department rather than being 300 kilometres away. If anything, there would have been some savings on transport for those patients, but I do not have the specific data.

Mr MALEY: Do you have the data on how many people came from CNR to Palmerston or Darwin hospital during that period it was stood up?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mr YAN: Are you aware of whether there was any damage done to the clinic space at Howard Springs during the period?

Ms FYLES: That is a question for DIPL.

Mr YAN: Speaking particularly about our clinics and hospitals across the Territory, we know that there have been ongoing issues with the safety concerns of staff. There has been a number of assaults on patients and staff throughout the reporting period. How many times have police been called to attend each hospital this year?

Ms FYLES: Firstly, any assaults on our staff are not accepted and will not be tolerated. We have a zero-tolerance policy within our clinics and hospitals. Those people are trying to care for you. We have police based at Royal Darwin Hospital and a strong working relationship across our facilities. The team is looking for some specifics for you. We do not have a specific for police attendance, but I am happy to take it on notice to see whether there is data kept. I assume you would want it as a breakdown for each hospital.

Mr YAN: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 5.29

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many times have police been called to attend each hospital this year, broken down by each hospital?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.29.

Mr YAN: Apart from Royal Darwin Hospital, are there any other hospitals that had police stationed at them?

Ms FYLES: For a code black, police would come immediately. I do not think there are people based at the others; it is more in terms of the volume at RDH. It might not necessarily be always from the perspective of staff safety; it could be investigations and that type of thing. I do not even know whether it is someone full time based there; I am just aware that there is someone from police.

Mr MALEY: I have a quick question in relation to what the Member for Araluen talked about regarding extra services. You talked about security and transporting nurses, doctors and staff home. Can you give us a breakdown of the costs the Department of Health incurred as a result of the measures you took to protect your staff?

Ms FYLES: We have existing contracts. It might have been that they just did more work.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of that?

Ms FYLES: We have security at Royal Darwin Hospital, for example, who are employed by the Department of Health. It is a sad fact that they are needed, but they also assist with parking.

Mr MALEY: I thought you mentioned that there was increased security and that there was transport for staff. Can you give us a breakdown of those costs relating to issues that the Member for Araluen raised about protection of staff because of crime?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take it, but I do not think it is necessarily about something new in terms of costs. It is some of the existing services we have.

Mr MALEY: I am looking for additional costs for protecting staff as a result of crime.

Ms FYLES: If we are able to, but it could have been that they just had a contract to deliver services as it is.

Question on Notice No 5.30

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of the costs for the additional services you have to provide to ensure your staff are safe at the hospital in Alice Springs?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Nelson has been allocated the number 5.30.

Mr YAN: How many patients are in beds currently at RDH, or is there an average for any given time?

Ms FYLES: I had that figure before.

Mr YAN: Was it 158?

Ms FYLES: No, RDH has 360 beds.

Mr YAN: Are they full, or what is the average bed occupancy?

Ms FYLES: It is 98%; it is popular.

Mr YAN: That is about 350. How many security officers are on duty at any given time for Royal Darwin Hospital?

Ms FYLES: Usually about three or four, but they are not just for security; they provide assistance to help people into the building if people are lost, they look after parking and they might help work with contractors. It is not just from a safety perspective; they could allow contractors into a certain area and have to escort them. It is that type of thing. They have been in place since the hospital opened, I assume.

Mr YAN: Do you have a number on duty at any given time? Do we know the exact figure?

Ms FYLES: I am sure that you have seen them on the site.

Mr YAN: I have, but I am wondering how many there are?

Ms FYLES: There are usually about three or four. It depends on the time of day.

Mr YAN: We do not know the exact number on duty at any given time?

Ms FYLES: Let us just say that there are four.

Mr YAN: How much does it cost for security at RDH per week?

Ms FYLES: I would have to take that on notice. They fulfil an important role. I get where your line of questions is going, but they have been there since the hospital opened in 1980.

Mr YAN: I am interested in how many and the cost.

Ms FYLES: We will take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.31

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How much does security cost at RDH in total per week?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. It might not be per week but we will be able to get some figures back.

Mr YAN: It might be for the reporting period, then I can extrapolate that down.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.31.

Mr YAN: How many security staff are on duty at Palmerston?

Ms FYLES: Would you like me to get you the breakdown? It is no different from the security here at Parliament House. They perform different roles.

Mr YAN: I understand that. I am just interested in what each hospital requires. If I could have a breakdown for each of our hospitals and the costs for the reporting period for each hospital, that would be helpful.

Ms FYLES: We are happy to provide some numbers, but we will have to come back to you with what we can actually provide.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Can we do that under 5.31, which is the security costs and just supplement in for the hospitals in the Northern Territory for the reporting period?

Mr YAN: I am at it now, so could we just do a question on notice?

Question on Notice No 5.32

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many security staff are at each of our hospitals, and how much does it cost each of those hospitals for the reporting period for those security staff?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.32.

Mr YAN: Have we seen an increase in knife crime in our hospitals? I know there has been an increase at RDH.

Dr BRICENO: We record in our systems behaviours of concern towards our staff, not necessarily crime, so we record any time our staff have been threatened or put at risk. Incidents are recorded on RiskMan, which is our risk management system. We have numbers like that, but they do not necessarily correlate to criminal activity. We do not have criminal activity records.

Mr YAN: Are you able to provide the reporting numbers Dr Briceno just said?

Ms FYLES: I think that was a question we took on notice before about staff.

Mr YAN: I do not think I specifically asked about staff incidents.

Ms FYLES: Are you talking more about presentations?

Mr YAN: There are two parts—presentations and threats to staff. I have some other questions about that.

Ms FYLES: That was what we talked about before.

Mr YAN: Has there been an increase in reporting of threats to staff in our hospitals?

Dr BRICENO: We had 453 physical and verbal threats to staff or incidents of aggression in 2021–22, and in 2022–23 there were 458. That is an increase of five, which is about 1%.

Mr YAN: Is that physical and verbal threats recorded per annum?

Dr BRICENO: Correct.

Mr YAN: Is that only until 30 March?

Dr BRICENO: Yes, and the same with the previous one; they are comparable.

Mr YAN: That is against staff.

Are we seeing more presentations of victims of knife crime in our hospitals? Are more stab victims presenting to our hospitals? Are you capturing the data on that?

Ms FYLES: That would be a question about crime statistics. We provide the care for people, but we do not keep that statistic; police would keep that with AGD crime stats.

Mr YAN: Does Health not specifically record what somebody presents to hospital with and keeps data on that?

Ms FYLES: They will liaise with police. If it is alleged that a crime has occurred or it has occurred, police may bring someone there for the care. But police would keep those statistics, not Health. Health does studies from time to time. You might have alcohol-related or scooter incidents, and the ED will do a survey of questions; that type of thing. We do not keep information on why a patient has come.

Mr YAN: Does the Department of Health keep records on referrals to police for matters such as somebody showing up with a stab wound? Does Health keep records or data on referrals to police for that?

Ms FYLES: No, because police would have most likely been involved at the crime scene. It is the same for a car accident. If someone is in a car accident, police will record it there and the hospital will provide the care.

Mr YAN: I understand that, and I have seen plenty of occasions where a person has fronted up at emergency with a knife wound and the police did not bring them there. Is there a referral process then from the Department of Health to police?

Ms FYLES: Police would be called if there was an alleged crime and police had not been involved to that point.

Mr YAN: Does the Department of Health record those referrals?

Ms FYLES: No, it is police from the start. It is the crime statistics.

Mr YAN: That is the only way that is recorded. What I am trying to get down to is if someone comes in off the street—I am only using this as an example—with a stab wound, Health may or may not refer them to police?

Ms FYLES: It is not ‘may’; it is not an optional thing. If a crime has allegedly been committed, Health will absolutely call the police. You asked about the collection of statistics, and I said that you need to ask the Attorney-General, because he keeps the crime stats.

Mr YAN: Health does not record the data for the referral for that presentation.

Ms FYLES: No. As I said sometimes you will have—I know Alice Springs Hospital records some alcohol-related harm, Darwin hospital has done the scooter stuff, but they provide healthcare, and that is another government agency’s job.

Mr YAN: I just was not sure and wanted to define whether Health recorded those referrals. You have clearly identified that it becomes police data.

Do the security guards we have working on entrances to our hospitals, whether that be emergency or general entries, have the ability to use wands to detect weapons coming into the hospital?

Ms FYLES: No.

Mr YAN: Apart from Royal Darwin Hospital, which has a police officer on deck, do we have anybody in our hospitals trained to detect or remove weapons from individuals should they present to our hospitals with one?

Ms FYLES: That is when you would call a code black, and the police would present.

Mr YAN: We would be waiting on police to arrive to deal with the situation?

Ms FYLES: If there was a security incident here at Parliament House, there are security guards who have a level of training to prevent and deter, but they would also call the police. That is the natural response; it is the same as in other public buildings.

Mr YAN: Has Health given any consideration to provide the security staff, whether our own or are hired in, to use metal detectors or wands if they suspect that someone is carrying a weapon?

Ms FYLES: I am advised that it has not been an issue, so it has not needed to be considered.

Mr MALEY: Were there any code blacks in the last reporting period?

Ms FYLES: Yes, I anticipate there would have been. What I was trying to articulate before is that there are lots of different coloured codes.

Mr MALEY: Code black is for the police, who get called immediately.

Ms FYLES: This is a national framework; they each have a definition. I am happy to provide you with a copy.

Mr MALEY: Can you give us a breakdown of the number of code blacks in the last reporting period?

Ms FYLES: No. I think you need to understand the framework. It is part of the health system to provide patient care. A code blue would happen multiple times per day, for example. I will provide a copy of the framework so that you can see why the different codes would be called.

Mr MALEY: I accept that and I am sure I could find that on the Internet if I wanted to, but I am asking how many code blacks there were in the hospital over the last reporting period.

Ms FYLES: It is not just one thing that would cause a code black. I think you need to see it.

Mr MALEY: Are you not willing to answer that question?

Ms FYLES: I just said that I am happy to provide you with the codes.

Mr MALEY: That is not my question. My question is how many code blacks.

Ms FYLES: I do not think you know what your question is; I think you are just fishing.

Mr MALEY: That is what this process is about, is it not?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to provide the medical code system that is used in the hospitals.

Mr MALEY: I will take that as a no.

Mr YAN: How many doctors at NT hospitals are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary contracts?

Ms FYLES: Most doctors are on fixed-term contracts.

Mr YAN: I may have forgotten to ask how many are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary contracts.

Ms FYLES: Dr Briceno was in Nhulunbuy for 14 years. He would renew his contract regularly, but he was still on a contract. The vast majority of our doctors are on contracts.

Mr YAN: How many doctors in NT hospitals are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary?

Ms FYLES: Do you mean like locums, who come in to do some work and then leave?

Mr YAN: No, I have specific questions about locums as well.

Ms FYLES: I will take it on notice, but the advice I have is the vast majority are on fixed-term contracts.

Mr YAN: I understand; I am just trying to get an idea of numbers.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, could you please restate the question for the record?

Mr YAN: How many doctors at NT hospitals are on permanent contracts ...

Ms FYLES: Sorry to interrupt, but it is in the written questions that were provided to you yesterday.

Mr YAN: I may not have seen those. You should be able to provide them to me fairly quickly.

Ms FYLES: That is all right. We will take it on notice, but they are in the written questions.

Question on Notice No 5.33

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many doctors at NT hospitals are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary contracts?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.33.

Mr YAN: How many nurses in NT hospitals are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary contracts? Will you take that one on notice as well?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.34

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many nurses at NT hospitals are on permanent contracts and how many are on temporary contracts?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.34.

Mr YAN: How many doctor positions are currently vacant at our hospitals?

Ms FYLES: There are 37 FTE out of 1,029 as at pay 20 on 29 March. Everything we are quoting is at that pay point at the end of March.

Mr YAN: Is that 37 out of 1,029?

Ms FYLES: Correct.

Mr YAN: Following on from that, how many specialist positions are vacant at NT hospitals?

Ms FYLES: We do not have that breakdown. We have a nursing and midwifery figure.

Mr YAN: That will be my next question.

Ms FYLES: As of 29 March 2023—pay 20—there was a nursing and midwifery shortfall across all of NT Health of 180 FTE out of 3,225.

Mr YAN: Was it 3,225?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Question on Notice No 5.35

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many specialist positions are vacant at NT hospitals?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.35.

Mr YAN: On those vacant nursing positions, I find it staggering and a concern to me, being from Central Australia, that you said earlier 111 vacancies are in Alice Springs Hospital, out of 180 vacant positions. That is a staggering number when you look at vacancies in the service across the Territory. What issues are contributing to those vacancies in Alice Springs?

Ms FYLES: The challenges in Central Australia are something we have had over time. That is why we are building the nurses' accommodation, to help overcome that challenge. We find seasonal challenges, but we have been impacted here in the Territory by the skilled workforce issues we are experiencing nationally. When you get to the more remote regions, you see that impact more.

Mr YAN: Are there any other considerations for those vacancies in our region?

Ms BRANNELLY: No, the minister has covered the main reasons for the vacancies in Central Australia and Alice Springs. It is challenging nationally to recruit and retain all kinds of health professionals. We hear about the post-COVID world where people are not willing to move around and leave their families and come to remote or other locations to work.

Mr YAN: Living in Alice Springs for over 30 years, I can confidently say that antisocial behaviour and crime are a significant issue in recruiting and keeping nursing staff in Central Australia. The fact that the hospital had to put on a bus to get staff to and from the hospital safely speaks volumes to some of those crime and antisocial issues in our community. Apart from a bus, what other measures are you putting in place to try to keep your staff safe and attract new staff to Central Australia?

Ms FYLES: Mr Deputy Chair, we went through these questions previously and we responded to them and talked about those initiatives.

Mr YAN: In writing?

Ms FYLES: No, before when we were talking about this. This is a replication.

Mr YAN: I am aware that you spoke about the bus service being provided. What else are you doing?

Ms FYLES: We built the nurses' accommodation to try to make it easier for nurses. We had some extra security services and I held the staff forum. Do you not recall that whole conversation?

Mr YAN: I remember the staff forum. How does a staff forum attract and keep nurses safe in our region? I understand the accommodation will play a great part in trying to provide some of that safety to those staff. The fact that we have had to put a bus on is a major issue. I do not know of anywhere else in the Territory where someone has had to put on a bus to get staff to and from the workplace in safety. What else are you doing to attract and keep people in the hospital in Alice Springs?

Ms FYLES: We always work competitively to attract a health workforce into the Territory. I think I can step out the response for the member. National Cabinet has endorsed the national rapid review of Ms Robyn Kruk relating to health practitioner registration for overseas-trained health professionals and international students who have studied in Australia. That is commonly referred to as the Kruk review.

The independent review of overseas health practitioner regulatory settings interim report was endorsed by National Cabinet in April. AHPRA—the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency—and the Medical Board of Australia are also implementing reforms to streamline regulatory processes and strengthen regulation around a number of disciplines.

The Kruk review highlights urgent action that we can take to get more workers here. We struggle to get the workforce. We have measures that are growing our own workforce, but we also need to get a workforce here now. There is a single portal for applicants to submit documentation. There is shared information across regulators to reduce that duplication, expanded pathways to fast-track applicants from trusted countries that would have similar training qualifications to us, streamlined requirements for recognition of skills and experience, and improved workforce supply and demand modellings.

Within the Territory we have targeted national and international clinical recruitment campaigns—social media and online for specific age ranges. We have had a strong response to that. It was formally launched in the first week of February through to mid-April and we saw critical vacancies advertised. We saw a significant number of visits to the website and candidates email for information.

We also have recruitment networking forums to ensure we can attract people. We are trying to grow our own workforce, so supporting 1,170 undergraduate clinical placements with 80% allocated to CDU students and our Growing our Own for priority graduate placements for NT residents are also important. We are doing a lot. We have additional early career entry pathways for nurses and midwives with less than 12 months' experience.

This is a challenge around Australia and we are making sure that the Northern Territory is not left behind and that we have incentives, whether it is working with the Commonwealth to fast-track people or making sure there are incentives within the Territory.

Mr YAN: I go back to the one salient point. Do you think that crime and antisocial behaviour in Central Australia are having a significant effect on your ability to recruit to nursing vacancies in our region?

Ms FYLES: Mr Deputy Chair, he is asking for an opinion.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: That is how you can answer it.

Mr YAN: I will change my question, Mr Deputy Chair.

Is crime and antisocial behaviour having an effect on NT Health's ability to recruit to vacant nursing positions in Central Australia?

Ms FYLES: We are working hard to make sure every location in the Territory is attractive and the workforce is supported, to get them into the Territory.

Mr MALEY: None of that answers the question.

Ms FYLES: All you talk about is crime. You talk down the Territory.

Mr MALEY: That is what all Territorians talk about.

Ms FYLES: No, it is not.

Mr MALEY: Yes, it is.

Ms FYLES: We know it is your one policy area.

Mr YAN: I raise it because if you look at the vacancies across the Northern Territory, out of 180 vacant nursing positions, 111 are in Central Australia. There has to be a correlation between crime and antisocial behaviour and recruitment in our region. It has been ongoing for quite some time. We all know about it. You cannot hide the fact that it has taken place.

Ms FYLES: We find it challenging to recruit to Central Australia ...

Mr YAN: It is obviously having an effect on your ability to recruit, and you say that it is not.

Ms FYLES: That is not what I am saying. I am saying it is a challenge to recruit to regional and remote areas; it always has been. We are putting in place different measures to assist with that. We started building the nurses' accommodation back in 2018–19, because we know that is something practical that will help us attract the workforce.

You sit in here and talk down Central Australia.

Mr YAN: I am certainly not talking down Central Australia. I live there; it is a great place, and I am trying to make sure it gets back to what it used to be. Sadly, I am not seeing it so far.

The first thing we need to do, because we are here talking about Health, is provide appropriate and adequate healthcare to the people of Central Australia. That is extremely difficult to do when we are 111 nurses short in the hospital. That is why I am asking these questions. I know that crime and antisocial behaviour is having an effect on recruitment. It is certainly having an effect on retention, not just within our hospital in Alice Springs but also in our remote areas. Nurses do not feel safe at work; that is reflected in 111 vacancies.

Ms FYLES: I assume that was a question. In response, the Health workforce has been significantly challenged responding to the pandemic. As we just heard from Angela Brannelly, the pandemic impacted travel and staff are choosing to stay closer to family.

Around Australia workforce shortages remain. All jurisdictions are competing for staff, offering attractive incentives. Nursing vacancies exist in critical areas, such as remote services and specialties—which we spoke about before—emergency, mental health, perioperative and renal. Our vacancy rates across the regions vary throughout the year, but we work hard to support our health staff, nurses and doctors.

We have other measures we can put in place, such as ensuring a quick pathway, safely, for them to come and work in our jurisdiction and to make sure they have access to accommodation. We work through all of that to deliver care.

We have talked about this before, and it has been publicly commented on. It is interesting that the member will not bring it up, but the changes we made earlier in the year have had a positive impact, reducing the amount of alcohol and alcohol-related harm. That is something our doctors and nurses deal with, along with our police and other frontline workers. We will keep working positively to provide as many resources and support as we can, and talking up the Territory and particularly Central Australia.

Mr MALEY: Are you saying you made those changes because crime was out of control?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, are you asking for an opinion?

Mr MALEY: No, I am asking the meaning of what she is saying in that contribution.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The Chief Minister has responded. I can offer the floor again to the Chief Minister if you want to respond.

Ms FYLES: Our health workforce in Australia has been challenged due to the pandemic, with travel restrictions and staff choosing to stay closer to family. It is not unique to the Northern Territory. There are workforce shortages around Australia. I was just outlining the Kruk review, which has been presented to and endorsed by National Cabinet, so we can ensure ...

Mr MALEY: That was not my question. You said that you brought in those alcohol measures. I am saying ...

Ms FYLES: You are interrupting. I am reading your response, can I finish?

Mr MALEY: You are not answering my question. It is completely irrelevant.

Ms FYLES: I have not finished answering your question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: One moment, Member for Nelson. The Chief Minister has the call. I do believe she is answering the question. It is a thorough answer, just like the previous one. I do not think we have a time limit on answers to questions, so I think we can give her the call.

Mr MALEY: The Territory is listening.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes, they are. That is true.

Ms FYLES: We are making sure we have the pathway for international doctors and nurses to come in. We have measures in place, which I outlined before in my response. There is a single portal for applicants to submit documentation; shared information across regulators to reduce duplication; expanded pathways to fast-track applications from trusted countries; streamlined requirements for recognition of skills and experience; and improved workforce supply and demand modelling.

In the Territory a number of strategies have been implemented. We have a clinical recruitment campaign, run on social media and online for specific ages, and we are growing our own. I was pleased to be at the CDU graduation just a few weeks ago with hundreds of health graduates. We also have support, with 1,170 undergraduate clinical placements and 80% of those allocated to Charles Darwin University. I spoke before in my opening statement about the work with Flinders and CDU on medical placements and education programs. We have early entry pathways for nurses and midwives with less than 12 months' experience.

We are doing a huge amount of work within Health and to support the workforce that we have. Retention is important to me, as well as acknowledging the hard work of medical staff and ensuring they have the opportunities to develop professionally. There is a huge amount of work being undertaken to ensure we actively participate, align our recruitment campaigns in the Territory and have the best medical workforce we can.

Mrs LAMBLEY: We are hearing in Alice Springs that nurses at Alice Springs Hospital are doing an enormous amount of overtime. They are burnt out, tired and feeling undervalued. How much overtime have nurses been taking over the last reporting period compared with the year before?

Ms FYLES: That is an important question. I will look for that information.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: While the Chief Minister is looking for that, we have 45 minutes remaining. The Member for Mulka has some questions, so I want to make sure he gets them in.

Ms FYLES: We have some figures, but not the previous figures, so we will take it on notice and break it down for you.

Mrs LAMBLEY: It must be an enormous amount of money, given that you were on the public record earlier in the year saying there was a shortfall of 50% of the nursing staff. That was in the ABC article I referred to earlier. Sorry, it was more than 140 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives; someone else said it was around 50%.

Question on Notice No 5.36

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Araluen, please restate the question for the record.

Mrs LAMBLEY: What is the overtime nursing budget for this financial year, compared with the similar period the year before, from March to March?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Araluen has been allocated the number 5.36.

Mr YAN: You spoke of the reduction in harm with the measures you had to reintroduce at the start of the year. The latest crime stats show an increase in alcohol-related harm of 52.6%; I am not sure how you claim that as a success.

Ms FYLES: In terms of the statistic you read out, I do not know what period it is for and what it is ...

Mr YAN: It is year on year up to 30 April, alcohol-related assault up by 52.6%.

Ms FYLES: I will rephrase it. We put in place a number of measures in Central Australia to restrict the supply of alcohol to those people who cause harm. There are two alcohol-free days, takeaway, Monday and Tuesday. There is reduced trading on a Sunday, one sale per day and a reduction in the hours. That has had an impact within the community. Police will say that and Health staff will say that. John Boffa was publicly quoted last week talking about it. If you want to keep finding statistics to talk down the town ...

Mr YAN: I am not talking down the town; I am just stating the facts. There has been an increase in alcohol-related assaults by 52.6%. Your premise is not exactly correct. I am not talking down anybody. As I said, I am stating a fact.

Ms FYLES: You are talking down the town because you are finding a statistic that backs up what you want to say. If you talk to Police, Health ...

Mr YAN: Why am I talking down the town by reporting a statistic provided by Northern Territory Police on crime? That is stating a fact. You are saying that what you did improved things. Yes, it may have improved things for a period, but now we have seen an increase in alcohol-related assaults by 52.6%.

Ms FYLES: Police will tell you those measures we put in place, the emergency provisions, have had an impact. Hospital staff will tell us that. They are temporary measures whilst we get more data looking at domestic and family violence—all those alcohol-related statistics.

These are difficult decisions to make because this is a legal product. On one side you have people saying we need to keep all these restrictions. On the other side people are saying that you are interrupting their ability to provide what is a legal product. It does not help our community when people constantly talk in a negative way. There are those statistics. We need to listen to police and the health professionals. That is what we will do as we step forward. We know those measures are due to conclude in a few weeks' time.

In terms of alcohol-related emergency department presentations, as I said earlier today, we saw them increase in November, December and January. We saw them decrease significantly in February. In March they were a little higher, but I think there were some other factors around March. We needed to get more data and that is why we left those measures in place so that we can make an evidence-based decision on keeping the community safe. I think that highlights the complexity of what we are dealing with.

The committee suspended.

Mr YAN: I will move on; of those 180 vacancies in nurses and midwives, can I have a breakdown by region?

Dr BRICENO: The total FTE shortfall is 111 for Central Australia, Alice Springs Hospital; 6.36 for Barkly; 6.89 for Big Rivers; 1.6 for East Arnhem; and 41.2 for Top End, Royal Darwin Hospital.

Mr YAN: How many locum doctor placements have occurred in the financial year to date in Northern Territory hospitals?

Ms FYLES: I think I gave that figure before.

Mr YAN: We spoke about locums, but we did not speak about the amount. I am also after the cost.

Ms FYLES: We use the equivalent of 60 FTEs as locums. That could be a specialist coming up to provide neurological services one week every month.

Mr YAN: Would that also include visiting senior specialists?

Ms FYLES: Yes, some.

Mr YAN: That is some. Is there also a different line item for senior specialists?

Ms FYLES: It is all doctors. It could be that some are filled because we do not have the population to have that person all the time, or it could be a position that is vacant that we cannot fill.

Mr YAN: I understand. It might have to be a question on notice because I will go down the road of the 60 FTEs, the cost of those and the breakdown.

Ms FYLES: We will see what we have. It could be hard because they all vary such as through filling a shift in a hospital versus a specialist coming in. I will take that on notice.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: May I have a total cost for the 60 FTE locum placements in NT hospitals? Can I get a breakdown by—would it be position or specialty?

Ms FYLES: I am advised that a breakdown is not possible, but we can get the costs.

Mr YAN: Can I not get a visiting paediatrician, for example, or a visiting anaesthetist? I can get only ...

Ms FYLES: It is a manual process.

Mr YAN: I am happy to take the cost of the 60.

Ms FYLES: We can get the dollars, but I am also happy to provide you with a briefing. We are not trying to hide anything from you, but we can talk to you about what services are provided by visiting specialists, because that would give you an understanding.

Mr YAN: We might do that offline.

Question on Notice No 5.37

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: Can I get the 60 FTEs and the cost of those 60 FTEs, please?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes. I am told some of it is in the written questions too. We will get that to you. I am always happy to brief you.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.37.

Mr YAN: From last year's Estimates, 1,400 Health staff had resigned as at 31 March 2022. How many resignations have we had for this reporting period?

Ms FYLES: It is 1,106 Health staff.

Mr YAN: Can I have a breakdown of those resignations by region, please?

Ms FYLES: There were 31 for Barkly, 50 for Big Rivers, 318 for Central, 54 for East Arnhem and 574 for the Top End.

Mr YAN: What was East Arnhem?

Ms FYLES: It was 54 and the Top End was 574.

Mr YAN: Does the department conduct exit interviews with all those people who resigned or are they doing it via the online portal?

Ms FYLES: There is online and there is face to face. Some just do not want to take it up and others very much so.

Mr YAN: Does the department collect some of the data on the causes for those resignations?

Ms FYLES: DCDD may have that data but we do not have it. Health obviously—Angela here, for example, talks to people and staff who work with her, so they have a sense of families moving interstate.

Mr YAN: Do we have a top three or a top reason why people are leaving Health or is that something I need to ask DCDD?

Ms BRANNELLY: More often than not staff are moving on because they are taking up life opportunities elsewhere or their contracts have finished and they have other obligations. It is not usual or common that staff are leaving because they are unhappy working for a hospital or the department. More often than not it is a personal choice to move onto other areas in health in other jurisdictions or in other areas of the department.

Mr YAN: What is our total FTE count across Health? I am being a bit lazy. I could probably find it in BP3.

Ms FYLES: It is 7,376 FTE.

Mr GUYULA: You mentioned community-controlled health organisations in your opening statement. In my region communities have been calling for a greater response to homeland health services. Since 2017 I have been having discussions with your office about emergency patient retrieval from homelands.

I am saddened to hear about another loss of life in our homelands. Last week a young man had a heart attack at a funeral in Gurrumuru homeland. I have been contacted by a senior elder, who is upset about the lack of emergency response for this young man, who was his close family.

What is happening to address emergency patient retrieval in our homelands? Why was this young man and many other people left to die without proper health support? Will there be an emergency patient retrieval aircraft for our region, and when will that happen?

Ms FYLES: Thank you for the question. I pass my condolences to the family and to your community.

I have declared a conflict of interest with aeromedical, so I will exit the conversation and hand to the chief executive. If you wish to raise these matters away from this forum, Minister Lawler is the minister who manages it, so I can manage that conflict.

Dr BRICENO: I know the challenges in the emergency response and aeromedical retrievals in the homelands in Arnhem Land, having worked there for many years.

The challenges we face are that the airstrips in those communities, particularly in Gurrumuru and others in the Laynhapuy area, are not fit for purpose for the CareFlight assets to land after hours and for some of them, even during the day. Most of these communities are outside the area of the St John Ambulance contract, which is normally a 150-kilometre radius from the bays in Nhulunbuy.

As these calls are infrequent, it is difficult to establish a system. We work together with the aeromedical retrieval service, the ambulance service, Gove District Hospital and Laynhapuy Health to coordinate a response in these instances. I want you to know that the Top End Medical Retrieval Service is currently being reviewed in order to design a model in the future that will have a better answer to respond to homelands.

Mr GUYULA: Almost halfway through last term, I had a look at a single-engine Mission Aviation Fellowship airplane that was able to fit a bed for retrievals. That is about all I have seen. I have not heard any more. What happened to that particular process?

Dr BRICENO: I have not followed that up in the last year or so, but my understanding is that asset is available to be used by St John paramedics, CareFlight staff, Gove hospital staff or Laynhapuy staff to respond to emergencies in the homelands. That, and other assets that may not be as well equipped as that one, are used regularly to respond to these cases.

Mr GUYULA: What ongoing funding is provided in this budget to address rheumatic fever and associated rheumatic heart disease? Has this budget been reduced?

Ms FYLES: We know that the determinants for rheumatic heart disease include access to housing, and we have invested significantly in housing. I think the 1,000th house was delivered a few weeks ago in Maningrida. As a government we are working to tackle this issue and contributing factors, not just from a health perspective.

The actual budget spent by 31 March was \$686,000, and allocated was \$936,000. It looks like it was fairly steady, if not an increase. Perhaps I can take that on notice and get you a specific figure. I can see \$936,000 is allocated in this budget specifically. Obviously people are receiving care.

Question on Notice No 5.38

Mr CHAIR: Member for Mulka, please restate the question for the record.

Mr GUYULA: What new or ongoing funding is provided in this budget to address rheumatic fever and associated rheumatic heart disease? Has this budget been reduced?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Mulka has been allocated the number 5.38.

Ms FYLES: There is a significant amount of RHD health service delivery, which is delivered in primary healthcare. There are the injections they have been delivering to prevent rheumatic heart disease. There is a lot of work undertaken to have those campaigns. Sadly when children need treatment for RHD, they might have to travel interstate for that. As well as that whole-of-government cross-sectorial approach that I was speaking about before when I took the question on notice, around those social determinants, we are working with Aboriginal leadership so that we can try to prevent overcrowding.

For the health promotion we know can stop RHD, there were impacts around the progression of the strategy due to COVID-19, but it is an area that we are keen to get back now that the COVID pandemic has finished.

Mr GUYULA: We hear a lot about alcohol-fuelled violence and crime. What is being done to address the underlying issues of alcohol and drug use? What has been allocated in this budget to address underlying issues? How many culturally appropriate rehabilitation centres are there on Yolngu country?

Ms FYLES: You have probably heard me talking about the alcohol policies, legislation and things to restrict the supply. It is just as important to invest in alcohol and other drug treatment and supports. We want to make sure we have culturally appropriate options for people so that they can be on country and connected with family whilst receiving care and support.

There is significant investment in alcohol and other drug treatment services. There is \$50m each year. About half that funding—not quite half—\$22.6m is provided to non-government organisations and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to deliver therapeutic supports. That funding goes towards sobering-up shelters. There are 96 beds across the Territory and nearly 16,000 admissions. It also goes towards volatile substance abuse rehabilitation; counselling, information and education; residential rehabilitation treatment services—there are over 200 beds—alcohol and other drug after care services; youth alcohol and other drug substance abuse programs; and alcohol and other drugs small grants programs. Commonwealth funding is also provided by the NT Primary Health Network and the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

There were 4,000 assessments conducted in alcohol and other drug services in 2022–23. There is capacity within our sector. Alcohol is the principal drug of concern, with 70% of treatment episodes from alcohol. Methamphetamines account for 10% of treatment episodes, and that has been relatively stable over the past seven years. We have two specialist withdrawal centres operated by NT Health. One is in Alice Springs and one is in the Top End. The centres provide medical management of alcohol and other drug withdrawal, assessment and counselling.

We know that alcohol has a big impact. We see fetal alcohol spectrum disorder as a factor. We have been looking at wet camps, and managed alcohol programs is one idea that has been put forward. That is where people who are homeless or transient can consume alcohol in a monitored setting. We need to be careful around that, but it is something we are considering.

There are a lot of supports available. Can we do more work? Absolutely. We are keen to work with the Aboriginal medical organisations and you can see that through some of the funding agreements.

Mr GUYULA: I am also aware of a dire need for dialysis infrastructure. What is NT Health doing to work with the Commonwealth and Aboriginal health providers to build more facilities so that renal patients can be treated on country?

Ms FYLES: I agree with you wholeheartedly that we need to have dialysis services as close to home for people. People should not have to travel into another town to live, to receive life-saving treatment.

We have done a lot of work and are developing a new renal strategy that builds on the recommendations from the previous strategy. That was interrupted by COVID, but we are working with clinical experts, ACCHOs, service providers and consumer representatives.

Short-term measures are under way to address the current demands for dialysis capacity. It is a challenge for us in the urban areas, as well as trying to get services as close to home as possible in communities. Immediate actions are being taken to address the challenges.

I know your question was specifically about dialysis in community, but if I can take the opportunity to speak, we are negotiating with Fresenius in Katherine for capacity for a further eight patients and additional chairs into the future. Hopefully people can be in Katherine, a bit closer to home and communities.

We are expanding the workforce skill mix for Aboriginal health practitioners and PCAs to support our specialist staff. We are increasing the graduate nurse placements and assistant in nursing positions.

We are developing a nurse-supported model for dialysis in remote communities with a FIFO model, so nurses can go in and out to deliver that care. A lot of patients say to me that they do not want to do self-care because it is too much pressure for them and family.

A lot of work is being undertaken. We are planning for and hope to construct a four-chair facility in Wadeye. It is really important for that community to have dialysis. We will continue to work with non-government and Aboriginal organisations to provide care.

We are also looking at the models of haemodialysis in remote communities. I think the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction where peritoneal care is not increasing. We do not have a strong presence of that care.

You can see that we are delivering lots of things. We have a range of locations where we deliver care, some of which are in your electorate. Do we need to get into more places? Absolutely.

Mr GUYULA: Capital works at Royal Darwin Hospital are badly needed, but I am also aware of issues of morgue capacity. What is the current morgue capacity in the Northern Territory? How often do the Gove and Darwin morgues reach capacity? What can families do when this happens?

Ms FYLES: Darwin and Nhulunbuy morgues can get to pressure points, but we are not aware of situations where they are full.

We rolled out morgues in remote communities. We are building a new morgue at Royal Darwin Hospital. It will have culturally appropriate grieving spaces and will be away from the main tower. It is further down the back near the helicopter pad. It will be a far more appropriate setting. Right now it is not appropriate. It impacts on pathology staff, so we are addressing that.

We have put morgues in remote communities. I know there were challenges with the design of them many years ago and there are challenges when they get quite full waiting for the Dry Season and an appropriate time for ceremony.

We are building the new morgue at the Royal Darwin Hospital, which will be culturally appropriate and have healing spaces.

Mrs LAMBLEY: Where is that money coming for the new morgue?

Ms FYLES: It is in the budget for the new morgue at Royal Darwin.

Mrs LAMBLEY: NTG?

Ms FYLES: Yes. There are also 32 new beds going into Royal Darwin Hospital in this budget.

Mr GUYULA: I have been raising the issue of an emergency patient retrieval aircraft for north-east Arnhem Land since 2017. Could you advise if there are funds in this budget to make this happen?

Dr BRICENO: In this budget we have increased the funding to CareFlight and St John to meet the demands of the service and that will have a flow-on effect into the capacity and capability in Arnhem Land. However, as I mentioned before, the reach of those two services into the homelands is a challenging issue, given the distance and remoteness and also the volume of cases. That is being reviewed at the moment in the design of a new aeromedical retrieval and ambulance services contract in 2025.

Mr YAN: What are the current overtime costs carried out by clinical staff across the NT's five main hospitals? Could I have that as a breakdown by region, please?

Dr BRICENO: The actual dollars for overtime in Alice Springs Hospital is \$7.798m; Gove District Hospital is \$815,000; Katherine Hospital is \$841,000; Palmerston Regional Hospital is \$2.152m; Royal Darwin Hospital is \$15.250m; and Tennant Creek Hospital is \$558,000. That is a total of \$27.416m.

Mr YAN: Have you extrapolated that for an end of financial year projection?

Ms FYLES: I know those figures are huge and we have done a huge amount of work to stop overtime and locum, but I am advised those figures are similar to the year before. This is one of the challenges in Health. You cannot stop ...

Mr YAN: I would say that they are not, because last year it was \$19.98m for the reporting period, which is \$6.6m per quarter. We are now talking \$27m for the reporting period—that is effectively \$9m per quarter—which is an increase of \$2.4m per quarter in overtime. Can you explain the reasons for this?

Ms FYLES: We are trying to grow our own workforce, getting people who have suitable international qualifications into Australia. This is a challenge National Cabinet first ministers are dealing with; we do not have the workforce to care for our health system. It is a challenge for us in this post-COVID pandemic space,

and we are all working incredibly hard to pull every lever we can to get people in so that we are not relying on overtime to care for people.

Mr YAN: Your staffing numbers last reporting period are similar to this reporting period—there is not much difference—yet there is an increase of \$2.6m in overtime. There would have to be reasons for that level of change, considering the staffing component seems about the same. There is not that much difference, except in the overtime figure.

Ms FYLES: Yes. When we were talking earlier about the length of stay for patients, the impact of missed care during COVID and those types of factors, all of that combines within our health system.

Mr YAN: When we were talking about staffing before and looking at separations for this time based against total FTE numbers, Health at the moment is running at a 14.99% staff attrition rate. Those numbers are huge. Most agencies are aiming for 6% to 7%. That is double what other agencies are seeing. That is obviously having an impact on these overtime figures.

Ms FYLES: I think there were 400 fewer separations from the department this reporting period, compared with the reporting period before. We are overcoming some challenges. Is there a lot? Absolutely.

Mr YAN: I am conscious of time. Like I said, I would happily have another 12 or 14 hours on Health, and I still do not think I would get through it all.

We were speaking previously about incidents of aggression on staff. How many actual assaults have there been on health staff for the reporting period? This is not just incidents of aggression, but actual assaults on health staff.

Dr BRICENO: Those are the numbers that we provided before about the verbal and physical abuse. We do not have the specific numbers you are referring to.

Mr YAN: That total number for verbal and physical was 458 combined?

Dr BRICENO: Correct.

Mr YAN: Is there a breakdown on that 458 between physical and verbal?

Dr BRICENO: For this reporting period, the physical aggressions were 83 out of the 458, which represents 18% of all the incidents. The year before, there were 117, representing 26% of all reported incidents. We are seeing a decrease of about 12% in physical aggression.

Mr YAN: It is good to hear; that is some good news.

How many hospital employees made workers compensation claims for the reporting period? I am happy to take it on notice.

Ms FYLES: We have it. It is late in the day. I feel like we saw it a minute ago.

Question on Notice No 5.39

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many hospital employees made workers compensation claims during the reporting period? What was the value of those claims? What was the cost of those claims?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.39.

Mr YAN: Is there a mechanism for nurses and midwives to report fatigue, overwork or burnout in the workplace?

Ms FYLES: There is a couple of ways in which nurses can report. There is a wellness app they can sign up for and use, or they can talk to their clinical nurse managers.

We also work really closely with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. I know nurses have a strong membership and we meet with them regularly. We have an open door, both the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Mish Hill, and me as the minister. There is a strong relationship there with the department so that they can be informed of issues that impact nurses at that time.

Mr YAN: How many work health and safety incidents were reported by nurses for the reporting period?

Ms FYLES: Can we take that one on notice, please?

Question on Notice No 5.40

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many work health and safety incidents were reported by nurses for the reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Chief Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.40.

Mr YAN: You may have to take this one on notice. This one relates to all staff. How many work health and safety incidents have been reported by NT Health staff in the reporting period? What was the severity of those incidents? How does that compare with the previous year?

Ms FYLES: I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 5.41

Mr CHAIR: Member for Namatjira, please restate the question for the record.

Mr YAN: How many work health and safety incidents have been reported by NT Health staff in the reporting period? What was the severity of those incidents? How does that compare with the previous reporting period?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms FYLES: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question asked by the Member for Namatjira has been allocated the number 5.41.

Mr CHAIR: Noting we have under one minute left, we will cease the questions and offer the minister a chance to thank her staff and close it out.

Ms FYLES: Thank you, committee, for the opportunity to appear. I again acknowledge the committee's understanding in having to reschedule me from last week to this week. Also to my department staff, it was an inconvenience but truly appreciated. Thank you for your support today.

We will try to get those written questions through to you. The offer is there for briefings, as you know. Our team across the Northern Territory do an excellent job in delivering healthcare. I thank them, and I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, Chief Minister. That concludes consideration of all outputs related to the Department of Health.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for coming in again. I know it was a late night last week for your team, but to have you here today, I truly thank you. I appreciate that a lot of work goes in and you do not always get to talk about it at Estimates.

Thank you, Chief Minister, for coming before the Estimates Committee.

This concludes the hearing for today. The hearing will recommence tomorrow at 8.30 am with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice.

The committee concluded.
