

MINISTER KIELY'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, welcome to you and your officials. Please start by introducing those you have accompanying you, and if you wish to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, please do so.

Mr KIELY: Thank you, Mr Chairman and members. I am joined at the table this afternoon by Mr Jim Grant, Chief Executive of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts; and Mrs Clare Milikins, Executive Director of Finance and Governance. As we move through the department's outputs, I will be joined by other departmental officers as appropriate. For Output Group 1.0, Parks and Reserves, this will be Mr Graham Phelps, Executive Director of Parks.

I would like to make some brief introductory comments relating to the department's budget as represented in Budget 2008-09, specifically as it relates to my areas of responsibility. This is the first budget for me as minister and the third for this department.

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts was established by government with a central purpose in mind: to bring together the management and protection of our unique natural and cultural heritage so that it can play an even more important role in economic development and in enhancing our wonderful Territory lifestyle.

The department's goals and activities aim to achieve six key outcomes: protecting natural and cultural assets owned by the Territory; protecting the community's interest in all natural and cultural assets; supporting the community and creating new understandings and expressions of Territory identity; predicting and assisting in mitigating threats from both natural processes and human activity; helping the community to care for and make best use of our natural and cultural assets; and creating commercial, educational and recreational opportunities based on our natural and cultural assets.

The department continues to leverage grant funding for key projects, some from the private sector, but most from the Australian government. This accounts for much of the increase in the 2007-08 estimates against the budget published in Budget 2007-08, and compared to the 2008-09 Budget. Much of this funding was announced late in the financial year, or not confirmed until after the Territory budget was published. The department has already received \$2.5m in additional grant funding since the publication of the budget in May. This funding received late in the year is not in the estimates and needs to be carried over into the next budget year. Grant funding carried forward from 2006-07 into the 2007-08 estimates was \$3m.

Mr Chairman, I am happy to answer questions in regard to policy and operational matters within my portfolio. I look forward to any questions the committee may have in regard to the appropriation for this year for the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts and the Territory Wildlife Parks government business division.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. First, are there any questions arising out of the opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: No, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 as they relate to the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PARKS AND RESERVES Output 1.1 – Parks Joint Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Parks and Reserves; Output 1.1, Parks Joint Management Programs. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, the Parks plan will include a capacity for the new owners to determine who receives concessions. Currently, the concessions are given to the tourism operators who are able to deliver the most responsible service in the park. Do you have any protocols in place to prevent bidding wars for concession holders? Under the new managers, it will go to the highest bidder.

Mr KIELY: Could you just tell me what output you are talking to here, please, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: Joint Management Programs– Output 1.1.

Mr KIELY: So we are closing off on 1, Junior Rangers, number of Parks ...

Mrs MILLER: 1.1 Parks Joint Management Programs. Just the heading.

Mr KIELY: All right then. When it comes to concessions, and appointments of concessions and the benefits to the public, our Chief Executive Officer is pretty well versed in these areas, and will address that.

Mr GRANT: Jim Grant, Chief Executive Officer. With your permission, I will refer that to Graham Phelps, Executive Director of Parks.

Mr PHELPS: Graham Phelps, Executive Director of Parks. I wonder if you might just re-ask the question so I am clear as to what you are asking, please?

Mrs MILLS: Certainly. The Parks plan will include a capacity for the new owners to determine who receives concessions. Do you have any protocols in place to prevent bidding wars for concession holders?

Mr PHELPS: Under the joint management arrangements, concessionary, there is a provision there for traditional owners to have opportunities to develop business and preference can be given to traditional owners to develop businesses. There are also, obviously, continued opportunities for other operators to be involved. Decisions around concessions are made through the joint management plan process, which identifies how, or what, activities are acceptable in parks. It also has arrangements within those joint management plans for the governance arrangements in terms of how those decisions are made. I would stress that it is a joint management arrangement. It is not a matter that the traditional owners get to decide which concessions operate on which parks. The traditional owners are partners with Parks and Wildlife in developing plans for those parks, and in managing those parks, and jointly those decisions will be made.

Mrs MILLER: So, the decision will not just be left up to the owners of the park; it will be left up to the joint management of the park?

Mr PHELPS: That is absolutely right.

Mrs MILLER: The lease arrangements will allow for hunting in the parks. This will mean that those people with hunting rights in the parks will be able to use firearms. What preventable measures are in place to ensure that such hunting activity is done safely?

Mr KIELY: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: Activities such as hunting and food gathering are entitlements under the joint management agreement for traditional owners to carry out in parks. The terms under which they are done on individual parks will be determined through the joint management planning process. I have been reading the draft Chambers Pillar plan which is in preparation at the moment. The traditional owners there, and indeed, the Devils Marbles plan, the traditional owners there have said, yes, they wish to maintain their rights to hunt and gather on those parks. In both cases, they have recognised that, for safety reasons, the use of firearms to conduct that hunting would be unacceptable on those parks, and so the management plans stipulate that traditional owners will be able to continue to hunt and gather but will not use firearms to do so. We will do that on a case-by-case basis, on a park-by-park basis, and an area-by-area basis on each park. The plan of management will carefully say if there are areas where it is safe for traditional owners to hunt using firearms; those areas will be identified through the planning process and will be zoned accordingly.

Mrs MILLER: It is going to present some tricky management if they decide they want to use guns in the future.

Mr PHELPS: It will be managed as a safety issue and as a risk issue, and through that planning process. I state that it is important to remember that this is joint management and so Parks and Wildlife are very aware of our responsibilities for public safety. The plans also go through a public consultation phase, and also go in front of the House. There are a number of safeguards there to ensure that inadvertent disadvantage does not arise through that process.

Mrs MILLER: I see it presenting a few challenges as to equal rights of using those parks in the future. Anything with firearms attached to it is going to present a huge challenge to be able to operate those parks in an open fashion. I see it presenting quite a problem in the future. So far, the two that have presented with their plans have not wanted to have firearms, so that has been a relatively easy step. However, I do see it presenting some challenges into the future.

Where a community living area is established in a park, what capacity will there be to ensure acceptable standards of cleanliness and hygiene of the living area will be maintained? Currently, many of those living areas are heavily littered, and they usually have wrecked car bodies or such like in them. What community living area standards are you going to set in these parks?

Mr KIELY: It would come under the joint management plan. Once again, if you do not mind, I will give it to Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: As the minister indicated, community living areas are allowed on joint management parks and are determined through development of the joint management plan and that planning process. The location of those community living areas, any conditions around issues such as animals which might impact on the park, or weeds that might impact on the park, will be dealt with through that process as well. Conditions of where community living areas are and the conditions under which community living areas might operate within parks will be covered through the plan. It is also worth noting that we already have community living areas within the boundaries of some of our parks, like at Watarrka and Gregory. The impact of those on the park, from a management perspective and from a visitor perspective, is negligible.

Mrs MILLER: Are you aware of any new living areas to be set up in any of these parks? You have talked about the existing living areas.

Mr KIELY: Are you talking about future joint management plans?

Mrs MILLER: In the joint managed parks. Do you anticipate any?

Mr KIELY: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: The only one that we know of at this stage – and, as I said, they will be dealt with through the joint management planning process, and so, as we go through that process, it may be possible that others will come up – that has been flagged at this stage is in the Dulcie Ranges. This has been a community living area that has been agreed to for many years and has not been finalised to this point. That is the only one at this stage.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. In the case of the West MacDonnell National Park, how would hunting in community living areas affect the attempt to have it listed as a world heritage area?

Mr KIELY: We are making great progress, might I say, member for Katherine. I am getting that ready for consideration for listing as a world heritage area. As to what effects cultural practices on a world heritage park may have, I will ask Mr Phelps to answer that.

Mr PHELPS: Again, I go back to the plan. The plan will be consistent with our drive to achieve world heritage listing for that area. There will not be anything in that plan which is inconsistent with that. Again, I stress, it is a joint management planning process. As the responsible government agency for Parks and for delivering on world heritage areas, it is our responsibility to ensure that those plans are not inconsistent with government's wishes to have that area listed for World Heritage listing.

It is worth noting that the two World Heritage areas that we currently have in the Northern Territory both have hunting on them. One has a sizeable community within it, and another has a number of community living areas within it. UNESCO, the body that oversees the World Heritage areas, recognises that indigenous people are part of the landscape and part of the environment, and have an entitlement to be part of that landscape and to live on that landscape and to practice traditional practices. Indeed, in terms of the cultural values of the West MacDonnell National Park that will make it successful with nomination for World Heritage listing, and part of its outstanding universal values is, indeed, the presence of a living, continuous, active, contemporary culture on that park. In fact, it can be quite supportive of world heritage values, rather than contradicting those values.

Mrs MILLER: How far along in the process is government in getting that listed as a world heritage park?

Mr KIELY: We are progressing along quite well, really, as far as what we can do from this end because, in order to get it up to world listing, it has to be actually nominated by the federal government. The federal government has a number of tiers that have to be met. From our line, we have done some quite extensive and quite good work by departmental officers to get it up there.

In order to qualify for inscription on the World Heritage List, nominated properties must have values that are outstanding and are universal. The Australian government is the responsible party for nominating properties to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, and will do so with properties which have been listed first on the National Heritage List. I would like to get it on the public record, because it is a great body of work that has been done and we do need to give credit where credit is due for the efforts by this agency. Mr Phelps, if you could go through that and, please, do not spare any names of those people who have put the hard yards in, because it is a great story to tell.

Mr PHELPS: The process of World Heritage Listing is a long and involved one. The first part of the process, of course, is to identify what are the values that might warrant nomination for World Heritage Listing. UNESCO is very clear on how those values must be outstanding and of universal value. It is not simply enough for us to think that it is a wonderful place. We have had officers from our department do some extensive research and background work. Helen Neave from the Biodiversity Conservation Unit has prepared an extensive background document, supported by a whole bunch of people, on the biological values and the geological values. Robin Gregory from our Heritage Unit has done an extensive report on the cultural values of that area, again, supported by other workers from her unit and from Strehlow. It is a significant and powerful piece of work. We have had those pieces of work looked at by an expert on World Heritage Listing, a gentleman called Dr Geoff Mosley, and he has provided us with feedback on which of those values are most likely to achieve the World Heritage Listing that we are seeking and how we should go about doing that. Those reports will be available on our website very soon. So that is pulling the background together.

The next step in the process is that Australia is a signatory to the Convention for World Heritage Listing, so it is Australia which actually nominates for World Heritage Listing, not the Territory. In Australia, we cannot be a national nomination for World Heritage Listing until the area is on the National Heritage List. Andrew Bridges, our Regional Director of Parks in the southern region, has prepared, with the assistance of those other people, our nomination for the National Heritage Listing. I am pleased to say that the body which looks after that at a national level has accepted that nomination for consideration, along with only 12 others from around Australia. A decision will be made on that in the near future by the Commonwealth as to whether the West MacDonnell Ranges, the park itself, will achieve National Heritage Listing. We are shortlisted, and our feedback from Canberra and from meetings that Andrew has attended in Canberra with the Commonwealth officials is very positive, that it will gain national values and, indeed, if you read the reports when they are on the web, you will see that this looks a bit like a lay down *misère*.

The other process is that UNESCO requires that nominations from state parties come from a tentative list. The state party has to provide UNESCO with a tentative list of the properties in their jurisdiction that they are likely to nominate in the near future. Nominations to get on the Australian tentative list close at the end of this month. Andrew Bridges is preparing our nomination for that. Those applications from around Australia to get on the Australian tentative list will be considered by the Commonwealth in the near future. Again, we have spoken with Commonwealth officers. We have presented them with the reports. We have had preliminary discussions and all of the feedback that we are getting from them is that they believe we are highly likely to get onto that tentative list.

Once that nomination is in, to get on to the tentative list, there is actually nothing the Territory can do until those decisions are made. Once those decisions are made, if we do get on the tentative list, then that will start another process whereby we will then actually have to prepare, with the Commonwealth, for the Commonwealth, basically, our World Heritage nomination package. The Commonwealth will decide when they put that nomination up. They have a number of properties which they already have commitment to putting up for World Heritage Listing, so it will probably be some time before the Commonwealth actually nominates the West MacDonnells. The process is well in train and, as of 30 June, the Territory will have done all it can to this point.

Mr KIELY: Thank you, Mr Phelps. Member for Katherine, there is pretty tough competition. The recently identified battle zone of the HMAS *Sydney* and *Kormoran* is up for listing. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme is also up for listing. That is the calibre of projects we are up against. You can also get the full list of the 13 from the federal government website. This was an election commitment of ours in 2005, so I am very pleased to announce today that we have fulfilled that commitment.

Mrs MILLER: That is a very detailed process to go through. It is very stringent. To get to the stage it is now, is there a cost factor? Is there a cost factor to get on the World Heritage List? Obviously, there is a lot of work, a lot of research and submissions to go into. Is there a cost to the Territory?

Mr KIELY: Are you talking above and beyond the hours put in by departmental staff, as in nomination fees?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr PHELPS: The only cost beyond normal operational costs, in a way, as this is a key project promoting our Parks Estate and I consider this in our normal operational costs anyhow, is that we engaged Dr Mosley to provide us with that expert advice on a consultancy.

Mrs MILLER: The process takes some time and requires a lot of detail. I am not saying it is not worth it, I think it is great. I am thinking of the amount of time that is put in by the staff to get to that point. Let us hope that it is a positive outcome for the Macs. It will be great to have it listed.

Mr KIELY: We, and all Territorians, share your hope as well.

Mrs MILLER: In your joint management of parks, how is the joint management made up? Who are the people who make up your joint management of each park?

Mr KIELY: The structure of the board?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr KIELY: Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: The framework act and the amendments that were made to the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act* last year, I believe, are quite clear in that they do not stipulate a particular structure for governance of any particular park. That is quite deliberately so. The intention was not to create dozens of formal boards across the Territory where that was unnecessary and not required but, on the other side of the equation, to actually leave the capacity to have a formal board if that was appropriate.

The governance arrangements under the legislation consist of two key components. One is that the legislation enshrines that the partnership between the traditional owners and the Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Territory government is to be an equitable partnership, and that gives some guidance in terms of the governance structure that might be formed in any particular park or reserve. The other component is that it is to be worked out on a park-by-park basis through the joint management planning process.

The arrangements for the Rainbow Valley governance, the plan of which has recently been through the House and has now come into force, has a very loose, rather informal nature. It relies on an annual meeting with traditional owners and a small consultative group to whom Parks can refer matters that are not covered specifically by the Plan of Management if we need particular guidance or advice, or decision-making through the year. It is a very informal relationship, as one might expect where you have a fairly small, coherent, single traditional owner group in a fairly small park without many issues.

Devils Marbles, which is in draft, is recommending a similar arrangement. Chambers Pillar, which is in draft, is also recommending a similar arrangement. We have not had those decisions around the bigger, more complex parks, like the West MacDonnell Ranges and Gregory. Where you start talking about multiple traditional owner groups because of the size of the park, I personally would be surprised if we do not have a more formal governance arrangement in those parks. That is yet to be determined and it will be determined on a park-by-park basis.

Mrs MILLER: So each of the parks will have an AGM, with a board? They will have that one meeting a year, if I am getting this right. Board members would be made up of equal proportions of indigenous owners, traditional owners and Territory representatives. Would that be right?

Mr PHELPS: No. There is no requirement for anything beyond equitable partnership and a case-by-case basis. It is not possible to say that each park will have an annual meeting and each park will have a board. They will be worked out on a case-by-case basis.

Mrs MILLER: I do not mean to be pedantic about it, but I am trying to understand how these work. They are all going to be different, but they are going to be operated on an equitable partnership. So, some parks might only have two traditional owners and two Territory representatives who would meet, making decisions on that park's operation, and some might have five and five?

Mr PHELPS: Yes, quite possibly.

Mrs MILLER: But it would be equitable?

Mr PHELPS: It is equitable partnership; it is enshrined in the legislation.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, I think that is clear. Minister, will you release the legal opinions to the public upon which this whole handback of the park has been predicated? Will you release those opinions, which we still have not seen?

Mr KIELY: We have been through that already in parliament, I believe, member for Katherine. It is a policy decision now and we are moving ahead for the good of the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Sorry, I did not hear that.

Mr KIELY: No, we have already debated this.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking you here in estimates.

Mr KIELY: I am telling you here in estimates.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking you. So you are not going to release the opinions?

Mr KIELY: No, we have moved on to policy now. We have debated that.

Mrs MILLER: Is it not the case that those legal opinions only identified three parks as being substantially at risk for claim? Can you name those parks, minister?

Mr KIELY: I am not saying that is the case. You are putting to me that that is the case. I am saying that I am not releasing the legal opinions. It was debated in parliament. We are now on to the policy that we are under the joint management framework and we are moving ahead with it.

Mrs MILLER: You are not prepared to be open and accountable to the Territory public to let them know what the legal opinions were to make the determination that you have?

Mr KIELY: We are here to be legal and accountable, member for Katherine. I am here to help you in interrogating our budget and that is what I am ...

Mrs MILLER: One of our budgets is in this ...

Mr KIELY: ... we are here to do and, member for Katherine, I have answered the question. It has been debated in parliament. I have given you my advice.

Mrs MILLER: You have answered it, but you are not going to give us the legal opinion? That is fine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I think that is clearly the answer.

Mrs MILLER: It is clearly the answer. Regarding your 'no permit, no fees' guarantee, is not it the case that some tourism operators are charged access fees?

Mr KIELY: The 'no permit, no fees' stands. There will be no fee for entering a park for park visitors. As far as tourism operators, Mr Phelps?

Mr PHELPS: The permit fee to which you are referring for tour operators is a fee to conduct a commercial activity on a park. That is under our by-laws; I will not try to remember the number. Anyone conducting a commercial activity on any of our parks is required to have a permit under that by-law and there is a fee associated with that. It is not related to joint management at all.

Mrs MILLER: So there will be no permits required?

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, I have just been advised that that is actually in the next output.

Mrs MILLER: It is actually management programs, and managing its permit fees.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The next output is titled Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs.

Mrs MILLER: That is fine. I can ask it in the next one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, you can.

Mrs MILLER: Not a problem.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I know it is artificial sometimes, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Very artificial.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is best to just stick with the output groups as they appear.

Mrs MILLER: I am happy to do that.

Mr KIELY: I will be happy to answer it then.

Mrs MILLER: It will probably be the next question asked. Yes, that is all I have for the moment.

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

Output 1.2 – Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 1.2, Parks and Reserves Visitor Management Programs. Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: It is the next question. Surprise, surprise! Minister, regarding your no permit, no fee guarantee, is it not the case that some tourism operators are charged access fees? Now that you have the information in front of you, would you like to answer it?

Mr KIELY: Thank you, member for Katherine, I would love to. Tour operator permit systems commenced in April 2006 with the aim of lifting the professional standards with the introducing, over stages, of a permit system to operate in NT-managed parks, incentives to accredited tour operators at Stage 2, and Stage 3 tour guide training program. The system is based on the work of a steering committee with representatives from NT Parks and Wildlife Services, Parks Australia, and Tourism NT. Prior to the introduction of the system, tour operations in Northern Territory-managed parks did not require permits, accreditation or tour guide training. However, tour operation in federally-managed Northern Territory parks, and parks elsewhere in Australia, required a permit. With industry advice, a fee schedule has now been implemented. It is projected to go over the next two years. Mr Phelps, would you like to expand on that?

Mr PHELPS: The fee schedule that has been agreed to for permits – and, as I said in answer to the question previously, this comes under our by-laws for conducting a commercial activity on a park. When deciding the permit fee that would be in place for Territory parks and the way in which it would operate, we felt, and the steering group that we have been working with on this with industry representatives on it felt that it would be easiest for industry if we streamlined it and made it parallel with the arrangements with Parks Australia North. The intended final position on this is that the fee structure will be the same. That is based on numbers of visits to parks. So, depending on the number of times you go into a park, it is a staged - and it is only a two-tier system - and the numbers of visits and the charges for those systems will be the same for the Territory parks as well as for Kakadu and Uluru. Although, one should note that the permit fees for Kakadu and Uluru are per park, in that you have to have a permit for each park separately, whereas our system will be a single fee for the entire parks estate.

The question of no permit for entry refers to the fact that some of the parks that are jointly managed will be Aboriginal land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, and there will not be a requirement for Aboriginal land permits to be issued to people visiting those parks.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. So, the only fees that will be charged are to tourism operator concessions for when they are entering the parks? That is all?

Mr PHELPS: Yes, that is correct. It will only be the fees that are required under the by-laws for commercial operations and concessions on parks.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Thank you very much. No more questions in this output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions for Output 1.2?

Mr WOOD: Yes, please. Good afternoon, minister.

Mr KIELY: Good afternoon, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Can you give a detailed list of how much each park has received in dollar terms for maintenance over the last five years? Would it be worth me asking, as I have a series of questions to deal with ...

Mr KIELY: If you just bear with me, I believe we have that information on hand. Member for Nelson, we will get that information, just so we do not miss anything that you want. We are here to help, member for Nelson. I will ask Ms Milikins to answer this.

Ms MILIKINS: Clare Milikins, Executive Director, Finance and Governance. Do you want me to read out each part?

Mr WOOD: Would you be able to table that document?

Ms MILIKINS: Perhaps I will give you the totals and you can decide if that is something.

Mr WOOD: What I am looking at is to see, over the last five years, whether maintenance levels have decreased or increased. I need to look at each park.

Mr KIELY: What park in particular would you like?

Mr WOOD: The lot.

Mr KIELY: All 87?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have another copy of that we can get off to the table room to be copied?

Ms MILIKINS: Would you like us to make copies?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We can make one in there and then it gets a table number and that sort of thing. So, if someone has another copy while the minister refers to that one.

Mr KIELY: Do you want to ask me any more questions?

Mr WOOD: It may be on that one.

Mr KIELY: Well, that is what I was trying to avoid.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you give us a detailed list of capital expenditure for each park over the last five years?

Mr KIELY: There it goes, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you show how many on ground staff, the ones that work in the park, and the breakdown of those staff, and how they are assigned to each park, over the last five years?

Mr KIELY: Mr Phelps, would you have that response for the member for Nelson?

Mr PHELPS: I do not have the figures over five years, but we do have them over three years.

Mr WOOD: That will be okay. Could you table that?

Mr PHELPS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: We will give it back to you, hopefully. Minister, can you give park visitor numbers over the last five years for all NT parks, per park?

Mr KIELY: We do have the data, bear with us for a moment, please. The data in format here is not suitable for photocopying. Can we take that on notice and we will get a good copy to you?

Question on Notice No 8.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question for *Hansard* please, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you please give me a list of park visitor numbers over the last five years for all NT parks, per park?

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

Mr KIELY: I am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.1.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you probably know why I ask this next question, but can you give a breakdown of the cost of running the Leanyer recreation facility and the Howard Springs Nature Park, and staffing for both of those areas?

Mr KIELY: They are in all those other numbers, member for Nelson. We are already providing them to you.

Mr WOOD: Terrific. Minister, I might be totally out of order here, but in the annual report in regard to the Howard Springs Nature Park, it says that the department is 'managing the water quality in the Howard Springs Nature Park waterhole near Darwin to ensure it meets new Australian Guidelines for Water Quality, and to be maintained at this level'. I have done my darndest to find the water quality guidelines, and no matter where I get, I end up with this one. Do you know if this is the document used to measure those water quality guidelines? I cannot find anything else.

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, I appreciate your love for Howard Springs, we all do. It is a complex issue about the water quality and the guidelines. For that reason, I ask Mr Phelps to roll it out now for you so that you can get a good handle on it, and so it is on the record.

Mr PHELPS: The guidelines which are most salient to the Howard Springs story are the NT guidelines, which have been developed in response to the Australian guidelines. The Australian guidelines say that each state and territory needs to work out how it is going to apply the national guidelines. There are Northern Territory guidelines for recreational water bodies. We could undertake to get a copy of those to you. It is a public document for all recreational waters. They are the guidelines with which we have been doing our testing and our management over the last 12 months.

Mr KIELY: Do you want to ask a set question so that we can provide that to you?

Mr WOOD: I would like to get those guidelines, if that is possible. Do I need to put that on notice or that is just an offer that will come later? I do not need them now.

Mr KIELY: We will provide them, if you are happy with that.

Mr WOOD: Yes, thank you. Obviously, you would have based the NT guidelines on the Australian guidelines. What are the Australian guidelines called?

Mr PHELPS: The guidelines are called the Guidelines for Managing Risks in Recreational Water and are produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). The Northern Territory guidelines we were developing have come from the national guidelines. I would like to remind the member that it is actually the Department of Health that is developing those guidelines. We are simply trying to manage a park according to those guidelines.

Mr WOOD: Through you, minister, can I just ask you the process then? Who instigates someone to check the water quality of, say, Howard Springs Nature Park, is it Parks or the Department of Health?

Mr PHELPS: It is our responsibility as the land manager to manage those waterholes safely and appropriately, and we do so according to those guidelines. It is our decision to do that testing to ensure that we manage the waterhole according to the guidelines.

Mr WOOD: Are there any other parks in which you test the water?

Mr KIELY: We also test at Douglas Hot Springs, Tjuwalyin; Leanyer Recreation Park; Howard Springs Paddling Pool; Berry Springs waterhole; Nitmiluk National Park gorge; Leliyn plunge pool and the Mataranka thermal pool.

Mr WOOD: Through you, minister, is Howard Springs the only one that has failed the test?

Mr PHELPS: Some of the other waterholes, I understand, have failed from time to time in the past, but for very short periods.

Mr WOOD: Before these new sets of guidelines came in, because my understanding is that there is a new bug needed to be checked under the new guidelines, if we were not testing under these new guidelines, would, say, Howard Springs be open today?

Mr KIELY: If we were not testing?

Mr WOOD: No, sorry, if you were not using the new guidelines, would the Howard Springs Nature Park be open for visitors?

Mr KIELY: It is important to realise that we are not going to deal in hypotheticals here. The fact is that we are testing, we are aware. It is not fair to the public; it is not fair to the department. We understand what the national recreational guidelines are and we test under them. To ask if we were not testing, if you did not know it is not going to be open, it is a hypothetical, you cannot ...

Mr WOOD: I understand it could be regarded as hypothetical but what I find difficult to understand with all the scientific literature that is now coming out, is that Howard Springs Nature Park was built as a reservoir originally during World War II. We are now 66 years later, more or less, and I do not know if there are any figures out there to say that over those 66 years, with all the thousands of people that swam in there, have we had anyone come back and say that they have suffered permanent sickness or disease from swimming in that waterhole? Because, all of a sudden, after all these years, you closed it down. So, was there some great influx of disease all of a sudden? Basically, nothing has changed around the area, except for the natural lowering of the spring level, but that is a different issue. In the Wet Season, the water still flows over, the spring is still operating now as it always has, and barramundi swim in it.

Mr KIELY: I understand your passion, and I think all of us here share your passion for the Territory lifestyle. One that is certainly enjoyed by thousands upon thousands of visitors and families of the Top End is going to Howard Springs. Now is a good opportunity for us to place on the public record exactly what these micro-organisms we have been testing for are, how they can affect people, and why we are obligated to go the pathway that we are on. This is a really important public health issue. It is not a matter of what ifs, it is a matter of what we have to deal with. Mr Phelps, if you can lay that out.

Mr PHELPS: I am not a public health expert, and I will state that up-front. I am a park manager. The guidelines under which we operate are developed by the Department of Health. It is responsible for us to work to those guidelines. As I said, I am not a public health expert. The advice that we have had from the Health Department indicates that the tolerance levels that are in those guidelines are fairly, I would think, conservative in some extent, in that closure of waterholes is based on assessment that one in 20 healthy adults entering a waterhole is going to get sick if the contamination exceeds the national guidelines. That is one in 20 healthy adults. Children have a less effective immune system, as you probably know, than adults, so the risk factors there are significantly higher.

In terms of the changes in the guidelines, one of the most significant factors, again, not being a public health expert but, as I understand it, is that the organism that is being tested for persists in the water longer, and therefore is a better marker of contamination than previous organisms which disappeared earlier. The organisms that we test for are not necessarily the organisms which cause the disease. There are viral organisms which cause disease which cannot be tested through bacterial testing. The organism that is used for testing is predominately out there as a marker of potential risk of contamination. One of the reasons that they changed the guidelines is because the enterococci is more stable outside of the body and in the environment, and therefore you are more likely to pick it up on testing than the *e coli* which was the main organism that was tested for previously.

What we are actually getting is a more accurate picture of the level of risk and the level of danger in the waterhole through the new testing. The national guidelines and the NT guidelines are very much about risk managing the issue. It is not just simply an exercise in counting the organisms in the water and saying, well, if it goes above that level it is unsafe; if it falls down below, it is safe. One of the difficulties with the all of the data that we have looked at with Howard Springs is, unlike a lot of other water bodies around Australia that these guidelines apply to, there is no discernable, predictable pattern of when contamination will happen. With a lot of water bodies, for instance, Port Phillip Bay and a lot of other recreational water bodies, if there is a heavy downpour after a relatively dry period, then there is a lot of flushing of faecal contaminants, etcetera, into the waterways, and it is easy for the managing bodies to say: 'We will close this area for this period. We know that it is unsafe, and we will close it for this period, and we will test during this period and, when it is safe again, we will open it again'.

One of the difficulties, of course, with testing is that it is always retrospective. That is, you take the sample today, you get the result back tomorrow, at which stage you do not know whether it is safe on that day until you have tested it and get it back tomorrow. So, you need to be able to predict when it is going to be safe.

The data for Howard Springs is really - most of it, a huge amount of the data, is in the closure zone and there is no pattern, apart from the fact that, right through the Wet Season, you can pretty much guarantee it is outside of the bacterial levels which are considered safe. In the Dry Season, it occasionally drops into what would be considered safe levels, but not on a predictable basis. That makes managing the risk there a huge challenge which you simply cannot predict. If we get a sample back which says it was okay yesterday, we could test it today, get the sample back tomorrow and find out that it was unsafe today. So, it is a very difficult challenge to manage it safely and manage those risks appropriately.

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, just getting back to the point about if you were not testing and people went into the water, blithely swimming along - we have been bending over backwards to try to find ways of having people assume responsibility, saying: 'All right, there is the worst spot. Maybe we can put up a sign and say: "Swim at your own risk"'. You just cannot do it. We know that the health risk is there and, in this day and age, when governments get sued for all manner of public liability matters, part our responsibilities as a good government is to look after people's public health. We know it is there. People go in there no matter what signage we have up, and it will come back to the taxpayer to pay for any compensation. We have been working strongly to address the issue. It is a really big issue.

You mentioned, 60 years ago, people swam, 20 years ago they swam. We have done bit of homework here and we have a graph on the accumulative number of bores of a period of time from 1960 to 2005. Member for Nelson, as you can see here, in 1960, we were running pretty small on the bores. It gets up here to 1970 where we might be looking at approximately 100 bores. As we go up, these are the bores drilled here, as you can see. As you can see here, out in that area surrounding Howard Springs now, there are over 3000 bores. That is going to have an effect on water flow.

Mr WOOD: That is not right.

Mr KIELY: Perhaps this is more telling. Have a look at ...

Mr WOOD: Hang on.

Mr KIELY: Well, no.

Mr WOOD: We are dealing with ...

Mr KIELY: Have a look at this.

Mr WOOD: We are dealing with where the spring is, minister.

Mr KIELY: Have a look at these bores around ...

Mr WOOD: No. I do not mind you telling me there are bores, but point to where the spring is, so people can see where it is in relation to the bores.

Mr KIELY: All these things affect the flow.

Mr WOOD: Well, if the government stopped pumping water out of the system itself then, if that is the case.

Mr KIELY: What we have to realise is that there are effects on the water flow in there. We are doing all we can, but we do have a public health issue here. It is just not a matter of ...

Mr WOOD: I do not mind you pointing that out, but that is an exaggeration, 3000 bores around the Howard Spring. Anyone who goes to the Howard Spring will not see 3000 bores. The forestry land is still intact and it does not have any bores in it. The bores are in the Howard River Park and Melaleuca Road area. That may be the number of them, and I am not saying that does not affect the spring, but you just made a statement saying 3000 bores. Well, there are about 4500 bores in the entire shire. You can say that is affecting the Howard Springs but, when you look at the map and look at the reality, that is not the case.

I understand there are some changes but, generally speaking, in the lay of the land, the land has not changed for many, many years. I am not trying to downplay that, in theory, if there is a risk you get sick. All I am saying is that that is the science, here is the practice. People have been swimming there - and I am sure that reserve used to get more maintenance than it did on the swimming hole - all that time. Let us see what the facts are. Have people been calling in ill from swimming there? Has there been sickness? That is why I say if you have proper maintenance on that pool every year, you do put up a sign saying that this just an open water body. You must have lots of open water bodies on Crown land that people swim in. Surely that opens you up to a huge range of issues itself. People go swimming in the Wet Season in creeks that are on Crown land, or in waterholes that are not public waterholes but they still belong to the government. The theory is you get sued for all those sorts of things. It just seems strange that it did not go for so long, and we actually had the pool open for swimming two years ago after we had some meetings with the minister, and all of a sudden this new guideline came out and, bang, she got shut again. I understand you can say there is a risk, but there is going to be a risk in everything in life. It is like saying, well, I have a chance of getting run over by a car, then we should ban all cars. Where do you take the risk issue to? How far do you take it?

Mr KIELY: It is not quite as simple as you put it, member for Nelson. We do know about these micro-organisms and we do know they are damaging to health. We understand and we have it tested regularly. There is not any quick fix to this. You can pump in heaps of dollars, but it just will not fix it. We tried the most logical ways to fix the problem. We have had vegetation removal, extra flushing, and we have done dredging. The problem is caused by general declining flows and the contamination from animals upstream and in the waterhole. We know that that is all happening; it is a wildlife reserve. Would you have us shoot out all the animals in order to clean up the water? Would you have this chlorinated? In other words, take away its natural aesthetics? This is the Howard Springs Reserve. It has a lot of value as a biosphere all in its own right. We are testing the water levels and we are doing all we can. Right now, there is just no way around what is occurring as far as the contamination.

Mr WOOD: Have you shot any pigs? There are pigs in that park and no-one has shot ...

Mr KIELY: No ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, can you let the minister finish.

Mr KIELY: As a nature reserve, do we value all the creatures around there, the whole of the biologies that are through there? I will let Mr Phelps talk more about the values of the park, about what is going on there. Do you want us to chlorinate Howard Springs? Mr Phelps, if you want to talk a bit more on that?

Mr PHELPS: The key issue here is that, as managers of that park, there are a whole range of issues that we have to manage. One of the issues is that there is a recreational water body there, and now there are Northern Territory guidelines which have been developed based on these national guidelines. I believe

it is our responsibility as responsible park managers to work to those guidelines. I find it very difficult to see how it would be responsible of us as park managers to ignore the Health Department-developed Northern Territory Recreational Microbiological Water Quality Guidelines for Recreational Water Bodies, and so we acting to those guidelines. Now, if there are questions as to whether those guidelines are too conservative or too strict, or whatever, I am not able to comment on that. That is not my area.

My division's responsibility is clearly to manage that park. We have to do that according to those guidelines. The data that we have collected, and working to those guidelines, shows that Howard Springs, frequently, almost entirely exceeds the safe levels according to those guidelines, and does so in an unpredictable manner, and it does so regardless, as the minister said, of what management technique we have done in terms of dredging, sludging, removing vegetation, and clearing vegetation from the edges. There is aquatic life, there is fish, turtles, bats, and there is a range of things in that area which are probably contributing to that contamination that are part of the system. I guess, beyond removing all of those, which will then take away from the park, there is very little we can do. It is contingent on us to manage all of our recreational water bodies in the areas that we set up. If we are encouraging swimming in areas in a recreational water body, we need to be managing them according to those national guidelines and the Territory guidelines that are flowing from those, and we do so.

In the case of Howard Springs, unfortunately, in spite of everything we do, we are falling outside of those levels. That means, for Howard Springs, we really need to focus heavily on how we make the rest of the values of that park really attractive. How do we build up activities like the fish feeding? There are sizeable barramundi in that waterhole and the attraction for a visitor or, indeed, a local kid getting in there and being able to get up close and feed one of those things, hopefully without dropping a lure in its mouth, is really significant. There are some really nice opportunities for walking trails through the riverine area. There is the picnic area. The draft plan of management, which was prepared last year and put on hold pending a decision around the swimming issue and sorting that problem out, did identify enhancing those wildlife viewing opportunities and enhancing the picnic area, improving the barbecues and tidying up. There is some fairly old infrastructure in Howard Springs for picnicking. The plan of management identified some modifications and improvements and new layouts for that area to enhance it as a picnic spot. That is certainly in our thinking and in our planning.

However, I come back to the history, I guess, of what happened 20 years ago or 10 years ago or, indeed, what happened two years ago regarding swimming in that waterhole. I come back to the fact that, as a manager of that site, I have a Northern Territory Health Department developed guideline for recreational water bodies and swimming in those bodies. I cannot see any way that I can ignore those guidelines in managing that water body. I really cannot see that I can do that. Everything we have done so far to try to open that up for swimming, we have not been able to consistently meet the safe levels in that waterhole.

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, when I was provided with this advice, we sought legal advice. The advice from the Department of Justice in terms of the Parks and Wildlife Service is that we have an obligation to take reasonable care to prevent swimmers from being injured by the high levels of bacteria. That is what we are dealing with here. There is no hidden agenda here. We have been working hard, particularly Parks and Wildlife people, to get this right, this water level. It is there, it is in the water, it is tested, it is known, and it is under the national guidelines. We are obligated to do it. We are legally obliged to do it. I know where you are coming from on this. I wish we could turn a blind eye, but we cannot.

Mr WOOD: I am not saying turn a blind eye, minister.

Mr KIELY: We cannot turn a blind eye.

Mr WOOD: We could drag on this forever. You have a couple of lawyers who wanted to discuss what reasonable care is. Could be you maintain it, you put a sign up saying this is a natural recreation waterhole, you do swim at your own risk. Could that be regarded as reasonable care?

Mr KIELY: I asked that question. That is the exactly the question I asked, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I am sure we have plenty of other questions. Thank you, Mr Phelps, for your answer. The advantage of Howard Springs Nature Park is that it used to attract enormous numbers of people. One of the attractions was, as is still on your web page, swimming. In this case, you have kids in a little rubber dinghy. That has not come off the web page yet. It still advocates the place for swimming. It was also crocodile proof. It was just a place you could enjoy the Territory lifestyle, as we have for 60-odd years, and just all of a sudden, because someone brought out a new set of guidelines, and I understand why they have

been brought out, we are all upgrading things etcetera, we do not have that facility any more. I accept the government has to be careful when it comes to risks, but I think you said, with reasonable care, and I believe that is an area that should be looked at. If you maintain it each year in a reasonable manner, and you warn people that this is an open body of water, not treated, and if you swim in it, it is at your own risk. I would be interested in getting legal opinion as to whether that is the government acting with reasonable care.

Mr KIELY: We do look after Howard Springs and we are looking to look after it in the future too. It is a great facility. Mr Phelps, you have something?

Mr PHELPS: You mentioned before about Howard Springs and duty of care. We specifically asked that question about signage and personal responsibility, and could we in any way indicate that this may be an area that may exceed safe levels and swim at your own risk. That was an absolute specific question we asked of the Department of Justice and they came back and said no.

Mr KIELY: I have been pursuing keeping swimming available at Howard Springs as vigorously as you, but not as publicly as you, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Do not forget I was representing a group of people called Friends of the Springs, the FOS, it sounds like one of those ...

Mr KIELY: I represent all Territorians.

Mr WOOD: Yes, and there were Darwin people, and there were local people who lobbied your previous minister who came down to have a look at the park. There was clearing done, they pumped the mud out, they took some vegetation away, they cut the weeds back, they put some buoys in the middle there to say 'fish up that end and swim down this end', and we swam. Then it was closed down and it has not been opened since. So, the mysteries of why it could happen then and not now, I do not know.

Mr KIELY: There is no mystery. I am happy to keep this going ...

Mr WOOD: No, no. I have taken up enough time.

Mr KIELY: There has been no lacking of want on the part of government to have this opened. This is what we are dealing with. This is the legal advice we have. It is still going to be a great experience down there, feeding barramundi, watching the long-necked turtle ...

Mr WOOD: Whacking a few mosquitoes.

Mr KIELY: A couple of biters.

Mr WOOD: That is right.

Mr KIELY: It is the Territory lifestyle.

Mr WOOD: It is a beautiful park, there is no doubt about it. Swimming is what actually made it and that is what brought the people. I do not have the visitation figures, but when I got them a couple of years ago, you could see the figures dropped off from when swimming was removed. It was a Darwin thing. I know you talk about us going to Leanyer but a lot of Darwin people used Howard Springs as a great picnic place, especially on the other side. I have seen it full of people, just packed with people, and all of them enjoying a quick dip in the water and then going home. But, no more. It is purely a tourist place now, unfortunately. A few people use it for walking, but the tourists come to look at the fish and they go home again.

Mr KIELY: Beautiful fish.

Mr WOOD: They are. We like to look at them a bit closer and personal than that. I have another question in that area. In relation to Charles Darwin National Park, there is a mention in your annual report about a mountain bike path. I am not sure where the mountain is, but I think that was the type of bike rather than the mountain. Has that been completed, and all the maps and publicity that goes with it? Has that all been finished?

Mr KIELY: I am fairly certain it would not have been about any mountain in Darwin, but I will ask Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: It is as close to a mountain that you get to in Darwin for mountain biking. There is a track in there that has been established with the assistance of the Darwin Off Road Cyclists Club, the local Darwin mountain bike enthusiasts. It is well known. It is mapped on their website. It is well used and well known by the local community. The track was developed in consultation with them. In fact, they did a lot of work on building it. When you are designing things like mountain bike tracks, issues of erosion, etcetera, become important, so proper design is quite important. They put in a lot of their own labour. They also received some grant money to get some equipment to help build it. It is operating. There are races there on a fairly regular basis and, if you are keen, it is a heck of a good track. It is a beauty. It is a very technical and really good track.

Mr WOOD: I am hoping I will get one down the railway line from Palmerston to Howard Springs.

Mr KIELY: That would be a little easier.

Mr WOOD: Minister, can you give us the details of the agreement regarding access to the Point Stuart Coastal Reserve? That was an area that was under some dispute for a while.

Mr KIELY: Details of the agreement?

Mr WOOD: Yes, that is in your annual report.

Mr KIELY: Development of the Channel Point Coastal Reserve ...

Mr WOOD: I will say it again: it is Point Stuart.

Mr KIELY: Point Stuart. Parks and Wildlife negotiated an agreement with a private landholder to gain access through this property as part of the Point Stuart Coastal Reserve suitable for launching boats. I am aware of that. Access through the private land was preferable to a much longer road through the coastal reserve. Fencing and construction of a short road through the Point Stuart conservation reserve to the boat launching area is complete. The private landholder has developed a business enterprise, Stuart's Tree Fishing Camp, landing, including visitors' facilities, cabin and camping accommodation. Given tidal conditions and constraints and the numbers of people that can be accommodated at the camp, there is a limit on the number of vehicles that can access the area.

Mr WOOD: In relation to the Channel Point Coastal Reserve, were Parks and Wildlife the people who contracted for the boat ramp? Was that part of the reserve deal, or was that Lands and Planning?

Mr KIELY: For a comprehensive outline of the project itself, I will ask Mr Phelps.

Mr PHELPS: As with all government contracting, of course, it was done through the Department of Planning and Infrastructure but, for us, as part of the development of that site.

Mr WOOD: My question is then: why did the first boat ramp fail? Who built the boat ramp? Was there a guarantee on the boat ramp, or is the public paying for two boat ramps when it should have only paid for one?

Mr KIELY: They would be DPI questions, wouldn't they?

Mr WOOD: I tried that; that is not all their area.

Mr KIELY: We are happy to answer that for you, member for Nelson.

Mr PHELPS: The first boat ramp was built to the budget that was available at the time. It was a boat launching facility which, basically, followed the lie of the land and was designed to be built at minimal cost and minimal construction according to the budget that was available at that time. It was useable, but only in fairly limited windows of time. We had feedback from the recreational fishers that those windows were not adequate, that they would like larger windows. We were able to secure additional funding to improve the boat ramp. The quality of work that was done on the first boat ramp was acceptable; it was according to plan and was reasonable. The additional work simply improves the boat ramp by improving the tidal window that is available to use the boat ramp effectively.

Mr WOOD: What, in theory, is the maximum number of people that can use the reserve? Knowing the road, how are you going to police that?

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, there is a maximum of 50 people, or 10 vehicles at one time. I am not quite sure how are you going to police it – it is a bit of a hypothetical.

Mr WOOD: You are saying that there will be a limitation on the number of people who can use the reserve, therefore, you must have a mechanism to stop any more people coming in. Anyone can drive down Channel Point Road. My wife's people live on the right-hand side and Channel Point visitors live on the left-hand side, and there is a farm there as well. There is some sort of gate about halfway up the road somewhere in the middle of nowhere. It does not have a security box next to it asking you for a passport so, in practical terms, how are you actually going to police the numbers at Channel Point Reserve?

Mr KIELY: Mr Phelps might have the answer.

Mr WOOD: Oh, he always has the answer. Can't beat him yet.

Mr PHELPS: There is a restriction under the access terms, because of the road going through the Aboriginal land there, that it is restricted to 10 vehicles at any one time and a maximum of 50 people. We will be managing that through a permit system and issuing of a key. Obviously, whilst one cannot ever stop people doing the wrong thing, we will have the capacity to issue infringement notices and the like on people who breach the conditions of the permit, because the only way you will be allowed to have access is with a permit. We will be managing it through our permit system.

Mr WOOD: There will be someone to occasionally visit the reserve? Does the reserve have facilities like toilets there?

Mr PHELPS: Yes, it does, and a campground has been established there. We have also established a satellite ranger depot so that we can manage the infrastructure there from Litchfield.

Mr WOOD: Will you have to pay a camping fee overnight like you do at some of the other parks, where you just put some money in the honesty box and fill out a piece of paper and put it on your windscreen?

Mr PHELPS: Because it is a permit only system, we can actually do that up-front. You will not be able to go there without a permit. The permit will stipulate the numbers of days and nights that you are there so, effectively, the camping component will be through that permit system.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. I do like the parks, minister, believe it or not.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on Output 1.2? There being no further questions that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Parks and Reserves Conservation Management Programs

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.3, Parks and Reserves Conservation Management Programs. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, in your statement to parliament on 8 May, you said: 'There are currently 203 threatened species of plants and animals in the Northern Territory and our parks and reserves are critically important in protecting them'. Were you referring to the Threatened Species List which is published on the NRETA website to determine those numbers?

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: Jim Grant, Chief Executive Officer, NRETA. There are different levels of threatened species and different versions of threatened species, from vulnerable to threatened, etcetera, and so depending, you can use different lists for different things. We believe that that is based on the book, *Lost*, published by NRETA, by the NT government last year, which includes threatened, endangered and vulnerable species.

Mrs MILLER: There were only 201 species listed on the NRETA Threatened Species List at the time that you made those comments. We checked. What happened to the remaining two species? Have these two species been restored to their former numbers?

Mr KIELY: I thank the member for Katherine for her diligence. We have told you where the data was sourced from. I am sure we can get that information as to what happened to the other two for you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you like to put that on notice?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I would like to know what happened to the other two.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will get you to restate the question, member for Katherine.

Mr KIELY: We have a bit of supplementary information that might help you frame your question.

Mr GRANT: Animals do move on and off those threatened species lists as they are made safe, and as they become threatened. It is possible for animals to move in between categories and, indeed, off the list.

Mrs MILLER: This is getting more interesting by the second, as you will work out in a moment. Minister, according to page 6 of the Territory government publication, *Lost from our landscape: threatened species of the Northern Territory*, 82 species, or 44% of the non-extinct species are not in any national park or conservation area. Can you describe how our Parks Estate is helping to protect those 82 species, as alluded to in your statement on 8 May?

Mr KIELY: I will have Mr Grant provide you with that information, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: You made the statement.

Mr KIELY: And I am giving you the information.

Mr GRANT: We have various ways of protecting animals that are not in national parks. If we wanted to protect all of the threatened species in the Northern Territory via the parks system that would be a very difficult way to do it, and that is not the only way to protect threatened species. Threatened species are also looked after through Threatened Species Management Plans, and for each threatened species there is a plan of action to make sure it is looked after. There are other ways of looking after them, such as covenants with land owners; control of feral animals, etcetera. So there are different ways of protecting different endangered species. Parks is one of the most effective methods of looking after endangered species, but it is certainly not the only way.

Mrs MILLER: I will go back to your statement, because you did say that there were 203. We are talking about a parks statement, so obviously in your statement, minister, you did not read the list. You would have noticed that 15 of those animals described on the list are classified as extinct. Do you not think it is a little late to implement protection measures for species like the Lesser Stick-nest Rat that has been considered extinct since the 1930s, or do you hold out some fantastic hope for their imminent recovery and perhaps we can then name them the Lazarus Stick-nest Rat?

Mr KIELY: Beautiful name, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Well, they will be risen from the dead.

Mr KIELY: And your question, sorry, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: You will have noticed that those 15 were not there? Well, okay, I have some good news for you, minister. Out of the 15 extinct species on your list, five of them have been rediscovered as not being extinct. After a very long, torrid and emotionally draining expedition going through the list, as well as an entry fee, the CLP has located five of your extinct species alive and well at the Alice Springs Wildlife Park. Why does your Threatened Species List itemise some species as being extinct when they are not? Is it not the case that the Numbat simply is not extinct? Now, this list makes a distinction between extinct and extinct in the wild. So the five species that are in the wildlife park are on the extinct list?

Mr KIELY: Extinct in the Northern Territory, member for Katherine. You have brought up some good points here and I admire your – I think there is a cartoon show on television, something about a family going all over Africa discovering things. You have done a good job, but I will hand it over to CEO and perhaps he can go right into it.

Mrs MILLER: Perhaps, I could become your advisor.

Mr KIELY: Well, you are retiring from politics. I am always on the look out for talent.

Mrs MILLER: I do not think so. I do not think so.

Mr KIELY: You would be welcome on our team any time, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Not likely.

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant, if you would like to go to the issues the member for Katherine has raised?

Mr GRANT: As is the tradition for every state and territory in Australia, those lists are published for the state or territory. So there are animals that are extinct in Victoria, there are animals that are extinct in the Northern Territory, and so many of those, like the Lesser Stick-nest Rat are extinct throughout Australia, but there are a number of animals that are extinct in the Northern Territory, but survive in small populations in other places, like the Greater Stick-nest Rat, which survives on some islands off South Australia in very small numbers, and those are at the Desert Park as a recovery population. The Desert Park is breeding quite a few of those species with a view to releasing them back into the wild. In fact, we have recently opened a nocturnal exhibit, which is several hectares, where we are actually trialling the release of some of those back into the wild. Also, at Watarrka, there is a large area where mala are being released into it as well. We are holding on to those species. Even though they are extinct in the Territory, we are hoping that one day they will be released back into the wild.

Mrs MILLER: Maybe the type of heading should be changed, if it is saying they are extinct, or extinct in the wild, and these are listed under an inappropriate heading at the moment?

Mr KIELY: It might save the CLP from mounting a field expedition, which would probably be a good thing.

Mrs MILLER: We do our job properly.

Mr KIELY: No, it is fantastic that you look at the list as you did. I am glad we have been able to clarify extinct in the Territory to extinct in Australia. All jokes aside, the protection of our wildlife is a very important role for all of us. I know you had a bit of fun with that one, but it is a very important subject and I am glad distinctions have been able to be made and clarified.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how far from the low watermark out to sea does your authority reach, as the minister for Environment?

Mr KIELY: Are we talking about parks, or are we talking the Territory border?

Mrs MILLER: I am talking about the environment, well, parks and reserves. So, do they stop at the waterline?

Mr KIELY: It is different for different acts, so if you can specify and direct us to what you are particularly looking for?

Mrs MILLER: Sorry, minister?

Mr KIELY: It is different for different acts.

Mrs MILLER: Well, when it comes to parks or reserves do the parks end at the ocean line? If a park is going down to the ocean, is it the low watermark? Or is it the beach? Where does the park ...

Mr PHELPS: Member for Katherine, it varies. Casuarina Coastal Reserve extends into the water around Nungalinga. Cobourg, of course, is a marine park; it extends to quite a significant extent. I am thinking of the other coastal reserves we have, which would be - Casuarina extends into the water, but Charles Darwin, Channel Point, Point Stuart, I would not want to answer off the top of my head whether we stop at the low watermark or the high watermark. It will vary from park to park.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, your statement in May was certainly an interesting one. How have your wildlife conservation efforts addressed the protection of the Blue Whale in the Territory's waters? Oddly, it was included in your list of endangered species during your speech, because you said there were 203 species on that list. So, it must have been threatened, right? Strangely, on the website it is listed as 'Not threatened in the Territory'. Can you tell us what you are doing to protect the Blue Whale in the Northern Territory? I wondered how deep you went out into the water.

Mr KIELY: The statement said that Parks and Wildlife in our parks play an important role in protecting threatened species. It did not say that it protects threatened species.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, protecting. How are you protecting the Blue Whales?

Mr KIELY: It provides harbours, it provides sanctuaries. The statement did not say that we protect every species there. I think you might have misread the statement.

Mrs MILLER: No, not at all, minister. Perhaps you need to go back and reread it. It might be a big learning curve.

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, I believe we are on the curve, we are doing pretty well. Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: In cases like the Blue Whale, there is obviously federal government protection for those animals. There is certainly no whaling allowed in Northern Territory waters under federal government legislation, so there is no role for the Territory to play to protect the Blue Whale.

Mrs MILLER: So it is still included in the not threatened in the Territory list? The Blue Whale?

Mr GRANT: It is internationally listed as endangered.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you now know that you had that on your list. You just did not know that before. And, if that is on the list, why do you not have a Himalayan yak, or a snow leopard, or Alaskan Otter? Why not?

Mr KIELY: Good question, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I think they should all be on your threatened list, next to the Blue Whale, minister. Does it not strike you, minister, that it is just a little disingenuous to refer to a list called the 'not threatened in the Northern Territory' list, and then include animals such as the kowari - not indigenous to the NT, but Lake Eyre in Queensland, and the Blue Whale, not indigenous to the Northern Territory, and then claim in parliament that you are protecting them? More than that, it is a matter of critical importance, as you said to your government, that you protect them. You do not need to mislead Territorians about this. It is already a good news story within the boundaries of the truth - because it is. However, minister, it proves that you did not read your list and you did not look at it before you made this statement in parliament.

Mr KIELY: No, I believe we answered it before, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: You have answered it. You are right.

Mr KIELY: No, we answered it before.

Mrs MILLER: You did answer it.

Mr KIELY: Well, that is ...

Mrs MILLER: It is clear, minister, that you did not do your homework.

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, I answered about the difference between protecting and protected and the role that NT Parks play in protecting species. You can accept that or you can have your cheap shots, I do not mind.

Mrs MILLER: It is not a cheap shot; it is not cheap at all. You made a statement that you were protecting these, and you came into parliament and said to all and sundry that you are protecting it, it is of critical importance to your government. Parliament is a serious place to deliver statements and, when you deliver the statement, we are given two minutes to respond to that. Right? We are given minutes to respond to it. Going to check it, we find there is an incorrect number. You said the species were threatened, and they were not, when they were actually extinct. Your list includes species such as the Blue Whale that are not even endangered in the Territory at all. So, it goes back to your credibility, minister.

Mr KIELY: All those misinterpretations that you put upon the report, member for Katherine, have been answered. They are on the record, that extinct ...

Mrs MILLER: Real conservation in the Territory is very important.

Mr KIELY: ... in the Northern Territory ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. We will call a break because we have been going for over an hour-and-a-half now. When we come back from the couple of minutes break we can continue questions.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are still concluding questions on Output 1.3. Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: Output 1.3 – no, I believe we have had enough.

Mr WOOD: An area I get a couple of residents coming to see me often about is the Tree Point Conservation Area. In the annual report, it said the department had sprayed and chopped down the poincianas there. It actually said that the Tree Point Conservation Area was east of Darwin, but it is more north-east. What was the follow-up program for that spraying and chopping down of the poincianas, and, has that program continued and did it eradicate the trees?

Mr KIELY: The program reported in the ...?

Mr WOOD: It is in the annual report. I have seen what the department was doing. There was an area of poincianas that had basically got out of hand and the department was trying to eradicate them.

Mr KIELY: To give you the most updated information, member for Nelson, can we take that question on notice please?

Question on Notice No 8.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, if you could re-state the question, please?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you give us details of the program, as noted in the annual report, regarding spraying and chopping down of poinciana trees and suckers at the Tree Point Conservation Area. Has there been a follow-up program? Was it successful, and have you eradicated all the poincianas?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.2.

Mr WOOD: I had a question about the Howard Springs Master Plan, but Mr Phelps has answered that previously. Minister, since the Labor Party came to power, have any new parks been created? Do you intend to create any new parks, and what are those parks?

Mr PHELPS: Channel Point Coastal Reserve immediately springs to mind. Sorry, member for Nelson, I am doing this off the top of my head without the dates of declaring parks, but that is one that immediately springs to mind since 2005.

Mr WOOD: I said 2001 when Labor ...

Mr PHELPS: 2001? I would probably have to check the dates and take that on notice and get back to you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Question on Notice, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 8.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, if you could restate the question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you identify how many parks have been created since 2001, and does the government intend to create any new parks in the future?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.3.

Mr WOOD: Minister, this question is in regard to the Litchfield Shire Council, and I am not bringing up any political matters here. This is purely a matter that has been of some concern, even when I was president of the council. It relates to the large amount of area that Litchfield Shire takes over when the subdivisions occur. Litchfield Shire has a policy that is supported by the Northern Territory Planning Scheme, through the Development Consent Authority that, when subdivisions occur, those areas of environmental importance are removed from those subdivisions and, generally speaking, when they are wetlands, they are handed over to the council; the idea being that, as Litchfield developed, our wetlands would be protected. A couple of examples would be the Howard River: the headwaters of the Howard River are nearly protected, and some parts of the Howard River are protected. Litchfield looks after McMinns Lagoon. Girraween Lagoon is coming up soon for a subdivision proposal where there will be decisions made about the future of Girraween Lagoon - one of the best lagoons in the rural area.

For the council to take over all these areas - and this has been a complaint from those who do not agree with that policy, which is not me - that requires a lot of work and finance to maintain those areas. Do you see a role for joint management? I am not talking about turning this into a national park, but joint management to help maintain those areas which are not only important for the people of Litchfield, but for the Darwin Harbour, as the Howard River and others run into the harbour. Do you see a role for Parks, working in conjunction with a council like Litchfield, to maintain these very important areas? I see the danger, and I have seen letters recently to the Planning Authority from certain developers saying these areas should be private. I know what happens when they are private. Generally speaking, they decline or they are abused. Do you see any role for your department, perhaps working jointly with Litchfield, to manage these areas?

Mr KIELY: I would welcome an approach from Litchfield, member for Nelson. I am getting an approach from you, but I am not getting an approach from Litchfield. It is their policy, it is their shire, how they manage things. They have not come to us with any proposal. If there is a proposal on the table, we would consider it then.

Mr WOOD: I understand that. What I will say is that I would be willing to go back to the council and say: 'Are you willing to start some dialogue?' The council has been through some major turmoil in the last year or so, and we have the election coming up, so it might be something that we would raise with the new council. It has been raised as a concern because certain developers, who certainly do not agree with that policy - and I do not support them, I believe we need to protect our creeks and wetlands now, otherwise we will be doing what other places do in trying to buy them back, and that is something ...

Mr KIELY: Are you talking about Mitchell Creek here?

Mr WOOD: Mitchell Creek should have been preserved right at the beginning. You are talking to the converted here. I saw the plans for Mitchell Creek. I thought it was going to be protected, and now I go past there and see concrete drains and grass lawns in the middle of what was the creek, and I think it is a shame. That is another issue, minister.

Does the Parks and Wildlife Service have a policy about weeds? Does it look at trying to completely eliminate the weeds from its parks, or do you just try to at least maintain them? I am talking about grasses like mission grass, Ngurra Burr, hymenachne, and even buffel grass. I will come to gamba at a later stage, but it is not a weed, according to you at the present time. Do you have a policy when it comes to weeds in parks?

Mr PHELPS: We actually handle the weed issue on a park-by-park basis. We developed action plans for all of our parks. In fact, if you go back a step, the plans or statements of management, or joint

management plan - whatever the particular document is that it guides the direction of the park - will clearly outline for that park what the weed management objectives are for that park. Then we have annual action plans which are developed and implemented to meet those objectives. On some parks, with some weeds, the aim is to eradicate and keep them out completely. On other parks, it might be managing weeds in a particular key area. Some of our parks, as you would be aware, are very small. They are not actually established for their biodiversity values and so the weed management on those may be nil. There is no overarching policy. It is on a park-by-park and weed-by-weed basis really.

Mr WOOD: Has the department done anything about trying to remove pigs from the Howard Springs Nature Park? I have had a number of complaints, not from rangers, but from people who have been walking through the park. Has there been any attempt to track those animals or shoot them?

Mr PHELPS: To give you an accurate answer, I would want to consult with the managers there and get back to you on that one.

Mr WOOD: Question on notice, okay.

Question on Notice No 8.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, would you please re-state the question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you supply details of whether there is any program to control pigs on the Howard Springs Nature Park?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.4.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 - BIOLOGICAL PARKS Output 2.1 – Visitor and Education Facilities

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Biological Parks; Output 2.1, Visitor and Education Facilities. Are there any questions? Member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: We are talking about Biological Parks now, are we not?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Have any biological parks been added to the Parks Estate since 2001?

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: The biological parks are the Botanic Gardens and Window on the Wetlands.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what has been the repairs and maintenance program for biological parks over the past three years, because wildlife parks are looking just a little run down?

Mr KIELY: Only for the biological parks over the last three years?

Mrs MILLER: Only for the biological parks.

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, we are going to have to dig that information out for you. Would you please restate it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*, thank you, member for Katherine.

Question on Notice No 8.5

Mrs MILLER: Certainly, Mr Chairman. What repairs and maintenance programs for the biological parks for the last three years have been carried out?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.5.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, do you have any plans in place to upgrade and modernise any of these parks? I am especially referring to the Berry Springs Territory Wildlife Park.

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, I have been advised that that particular question relates to Territory Wildlife Park.

Mrs MILLER: All right, I will leave the words 'especially Berry Springs Territory Wildlife Park' out of it for this area. My question is: what plans are in place to upgrade and modernise our biological parks?

Mr GRANT: The biological parks under this output, as I understand it, are George Brown Botanic Gardens, Olive Pink Botanic Gardens and Window on the Wetlands. The Desert Park and Berry Springs are further down. I do not know whether people have been to the Botanic Gardens lately, but we have just finished the new boardwalk through the rainforest and the children's garden. At present, we are working on the eco-house, or green house, up the top which will be an example of how people can live more sustainable lifestyles in the Darwin area, including a permaculture-style garden and also water tanks, etcetera, on the house. That will become an example of a green house.

At Window on the Wetlands, there have been recent upgrades to the upstairs part, and those general signage upgrades will continue at Window on the Wetlands. With the Olive Pink Botanic Gardens, we are actually a conduit for funding but it is an independent board. We have just allocated an extra \$20 000 to Olive Pink this financial year and also the coming financial year. You can see the results of that at Olive Pink. It has gone ahead in leaps and bounds lately, particularly the restaurant and the new gardens.

Mrs MILLER: I look forward to seeing that when I am there in a couple of weeks' time. That will be good. George Brown would be very pleased. Minister, what is your main method of promoting biological parks in the Northern Territory?

Mr GRANT: The main ways of promoting the biological parks are brochures, basically. It depends on the park. With the Botanic Gardens, it tends to be brochures. With Window on the Wetlands, it tends to be promoted to the various tour operators going through there, so it is more specific to the operators. Olive Pink has their own board. I believe Olive Pink is really word of mouth. It has its own reputation in that community.

Mrs MILLER: Do you put your brochures to Top End Tourism or Tourism Top End and send it out like that, or do you just have brochures in your parks?

Mr GRANT: For the Desert Park and Berry Springs the brochures are widely promoted, but for the Botanic Gardens it does tend to be just in the major places.

Mrs MILLER: That is true. That is all I have for that output, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, any questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Is the Amphitheatre part of the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens as well?

Mr GRANT: That is run by Darwin City Council.

Mr WOOD: Is there much of a problem in the form of damage to the park when there are concerts at the amphitheatre or, generally speaking, is it pretty well looked after these days? Say *BassintheGrass* and some of the big concerts, people walk out through the Botanic Gardens. I am asking if there is any ...

Mr KIELY: Major events at the amphitheatre?

Mr WOOD: Are there any downsides to the Botanic Gardens, or it is not a problem?

Mr GRANT: In broad terms, the Botanic Gardens suffers amazingly little vandalism, but it does suffer from litter quite a bit on those concert nights. That takes up staff time. The only instance I can think of, of serious damage to the gardens, was the burning of some palm trees in the middle of last year. That was not related to any event.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you, Mr Chairman.

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

Output 2.2 – Botanic Gardens

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: I only have one, and it is just for statistical purposes and curiosity. How do you measure the visitor numbers and visitor satisfaction with the venue? List any new significant visitor experiences to Botanic Gardens. How do you measure your visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction with the venue and list any new significant visitor experiences?

Mr GRANT: The numbers to the Botanic Gardens, because there is no admission fee or anything, does become a calculation rather than an actual measure. We have car counters at the top and bottom of the gardens which count cars. A few times every year we do a calibration based on how many people are in various vehicles and calibrate it that way. As far as visitor satisfaction goes, I am not sure whether it is with Tourism NT or through our own service, but we do surveys every year to gauge visitor satisfaction on certain sampling days a year.

Mrs MILLER: So, if you do not get any complaints, you think people are satisfied?

Mr GRANT: No, we actually do do proper surveys on a couple days of the year where we take forms and properly count them and collate them.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Mr Grant. That is all I have, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 - NATURAL RESOURCES Output 3.1 - Natural Resource Assessments

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Natural Resources; Output 3.1, Natural Resource Assessments. Are there any questions?

Mr KIELY: One moment, please. I would like to welcome a few people to the table: Dr Diana Leeder, Mr John Gilmore and Dr Dale Dixon. Dr Diana Leeder is the Executive Director of Natural Resource Management; Mr John Gilmore is Executive Director Land and Water; and Dr Dale Dixon is the Acting Executive Director Biodiversity Conservation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mrs MILLER: I do not think you will need to get too comfortable. In last year's Budget Paper, on page 218, you had 'Creation of Commercial Recreational Employment Opportunities'. It is not there this year as one of your outcomes. Can you tell me why not?

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, in Budget Paper No 3, page 232 ...

Mrs MILLER: It is not there this year, so this is last year, page 218.

Mr KIELY: If we are talking about the same one, in the second dot point, 'creating commercial, educational and recreational opportunities through the use of natural resources, artistic and creative

enterprises in government-owned entities including the Desert and Territory Wildlife Parks, the Araluen Centre, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, heritage buildings, Botanic Gardens and the Parks Estate'. That is the second dot point on page 232, Budget Paper No 3.

Mrs MILLER: So that is one of your outcomes this year? I have missed that one somewhere. Sorry, minister.

What is the Strategic Assessment Program and why is there one less this year?

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, the Strategic Assessment Programs are:

- biodiversity - that is biodiversity imagery, policy and planning;
- land capability and vegetation - there are six programs under that: VRD/Bullo River; Daly/Darwin Region; Central Australian horticulture; Northern Territory vegetation mapping; and Northern Territory digitisation project; and
- coastlines - there are three: Darwin Harbour; Daly estuary and Nhulunbuy.

The 2007-08 published figure was 11. The change includes the transfer of the two biodiversity programs; that is, Sustainable Use of Wildlife and Pest Control; the Natural Resource management activities and the additional coastlines, the Nhulunbuy program.

Mrs MILLER: So, which ones have you dropped this year?

Mr KIELY: I will ask Mrs Milikins to answer that.

Mrs MILIKINS: There are a number of changes. The Sustainable Use of Wildlife and Pest Control programs have moved to the Natural Resource Activities output. They were more on-the-ground natural resource management activities. We have added an additional program to the assessments, which was the Nhulunbuy Coastlines Program. So, two gone, one in.

Mrs MILLER: Would I be able to ask, through the Chair, in a roundabout way, if you could provide me with the list of the programs that were carried out last year? The Strategic Assessment Programs you carried out last year were one more than this year. Are you able to provide a list of both years - what the programs are?

Mrs MILIKINS: The programs are ongoing programs so they are not annual programs. We are more than happy to provide that listing.

Mrs MILLER: That would be fine. Could I, through the Chair ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: You would like to put that question on notice?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 8.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please restate the question, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Could you please provide a list of the programs, or name the programs in last year's and this year's Strategic Assessment Programs?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 8.6.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. That is all I have for that output, Mr Chairman.

Mr WOOD: Minister, Daly River. I lived on the Daly and I do not want to see the Daly stuffed up either. I query the reasons for the moratorium on clearing that the government announced on 12 December 2007. Bearing in mind, also, I am not a great fan of broad-scale clearing. Minister, the headline on a media release between you and the Chief Minister, Paul Henderson, was that the Daly River will be protected from broad-scale land clearing for a further two years. One of the reasons you stated here was that:

Minister Kiely said it's crucial we get the right alignment between water allocation and native vegetation clearing. 'In particular, the Daly River Management Advisory Committee will look closely at the Tindal and Ooloo aquifers which feed into the Daly River' ...

The application for clearing was for non-irrigated crops and could hardly be described as broad-scale clearing, and would have been subject to the very stringent land clearing guidelines the Northern Territory has. I ask: how can you use the studies of the Ooloo and Tindal aquifers - which are important and I am not knocking that at all - as a reason not to clear land for non-irrigated pastures?

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, good question. It goes down to the when the land clearing application goes in and what happens afterwards which is a matter of concern. The link between land clearing applications, land clearing and the water - Dr Leeder, you might be the best one to go through the process for the member for Nelson, particularly what happens after a land clearing application may be granted and what controls we have over the land after that. That is what he is getting at.

Dr LEEDER: Diana Leeder, Executive Director, Natural Resource Management. Member for Nelson, the concern is to ensure that any future uses of the land also are considered and what might be the impact on what is there. Some of the studies that still needed to be carried out were on the impact of clearing, for whatever purpose, on the flow into the river, and on sediment, a range of things like that, as well as on habitat.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I understand that, and a normal land clearing application, I would imagine, would take that all into account. This is a moratorium based on what you said: you needed more technical information on two aquifers, the land was not to be used for irrigated pastures, and you could have actually, in approving the clearing of this land, said this is not for irrigated pastures unless approval was given by the minister. Some of these Daly River people, as you would have heard on the radio, one of the local farmers walked out of a meeting with the Minister for Lands and Planning. Ian McBean, who was the person applying for the clearing, and it was not very many hectares, a couple of hundred hectares of land he wanted to clear, he just could not believe that one could apply the principle of looking at the Ooloo and Tindal aquifers and put that into a moratorium for non-irrigated clearing. That is the problem I have. It seems to me that it is more political than based on good planning or environmental science.

Mr KIELY: Actually, it is based on good planning and environmental science, member for Nelson. You consistently take the rod to the back of this government about planning, and this is all about planning. This is all about getting it right. We want to get it right down the Daly for the future generations. We want to make sure that that two-year moratorium, in the greater scheme of things, and we understand how landholders there feel about this, and we feel too, member for Nelson, but we want to get it right for the future generations. This is the best way forward.

Mr WOOD: Minister, you are talking to someone who was part of the first push by residents to get land clearing restrictions in the Litchfield Shire. When I first came to the rural area, you could clear your block totally. I was one, with a couple of other people, who pushed for land clearing guidelines. We have stringent land clearing guidelines. You have a look at them in the NT Planning Scheme, they are stringent. Surely, much as I appreciate you have to get it right, I am not disagreeing with you, but there is already a four year moratorium. The Daly River advisory group did not have any problems; they have been working through the guidelines for the land clearing. If you had said in your media release a little of what Dr Leeder said then about run-offs, etcetera, and there had not been enough work on that, I may have accepted that. But you used the argument that we needed to see how much more water is in the Ooloo and Tindal aquifers, and apply that to something that had nothing really to do with that, to stop any more land clearing. I have a great deal of difficulty saying that is good planning because it is not based on logic, I believe.

Mr KIELY: I know your position on planning and your passion for planning. As I said before, you have the information that we based the extension of the moratorium on in order to ensure we get it right for all Territorians, all Australians. We stand by Dr Leeder's claim about run-off and the future use of the land and the work that we have to do. Now, in two years, May 2010, that will be completed in the greater scheme of things, it is another extensive extension. It is an important extension, one that we have to have, and one that we have to make sure that the Daly is protected into the future. We do not want to make the same

mistakes that have happened down south, far from it. Member for Nelson, this is not a case of one standing up against the other and saying: 'I care more for country than you'. We understand everyone's passion for country, and we will get it right. We are not trying to get it right, we are going to get it right. That is why we have gone for the two year extension to make sure we do.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I agree with you. But I believe sometimes you also have to take what we talk about here in this area and have a look on the ground at what we are talking about. What was the land that was asked to be cleared? I saw the plans for it. They were a long way from the Daly River. There were discreet patches of land. We have also had information come from a professor who looked at the siltation issue. He said the siltation was not from land clearing but from the increased volumes of rainfall in the catchment. I would have thought the evidence, based on what he said, based on the actual area permitted to be cleared, which has restrictions on slope, how much can be cleared, wildlife corridors, all that for such a small area to help people who bought land presuming they could develop it, and are now told they will have another two years before they can use it as they thought they could at the beginning.

The principle is good, but the application of what you are doing is unfair to those people who have lived there. Those farmers, I know people have this sort of idea that all cockies are bad people, well they probably also go fishing for barramundi. They probably love the river as much as I do. I used to work on the river. I used to farm the river. I can tell you, where I farmed it, it had more problems than the Douglas Daly had because I farmed land downstream where Perry's caravan park is, and if you have ever been down there, you would see mounds of sand, because it was all cleared there for peanuts and other crops. It should never have been cleared because it is subject to flood and soils subject to erosion. I know what the river can do, but I also know that if you use your science and sense you can do it. I believe we have taken this moratorium a little to the extreme to the detriment of people who paid good money for land, who love the river, but are just trying to make a living.

Mr KIELY: Member for Nelson, I can only address the issue. I am sure it was tongue in cheek, so I am not going to go on about it about how some people think farmers are this or farmers are that. That is not driving this. It is the future generation, it is getting it right, it is getting the science behind it. That is what is driving this. We do not have all the data and information we need to make a quality decision to decide which way to take the land clearing or farming options, or whatever land usages are there in regard to biodiversity and water usage. We have seen what happens along the river corridors. Water extraction in the Murray Darling Basin is one to really hold up. Even as of yesterday, there were some pretty horrible stories coming out about the health of that river and how far gone it is. There are waterways all over the country that have suffered through people not taking the time to plan and get the processes right. We are taking it down. It is not because we think, oh well, there is a small number of people down there who are going to suffer. That moratorium has been in place for four years now ...

Mr WOOD: I am saying the reasoning does not make sense.

Mr KIELY: We do not have all the data yet. We want to get that data. We want to make the best decision for all Territorians, and for all Australians. This is really an issue of national significance. We want to get it right, we will get it right. We need that time. We need people to work with us on this. We need you to work with us, member for Nelson. We understand your feeling of passion for the place and I understand you are here supporting those people who live in the moratorium area. It is about getting it right. There is no other underlying principle here. It is about gathering the data so that when we make our choices, we make the right choices and we look at sustainability of the resource.

Mr WOOD: Absolutely, minister. What concerns me, and there is an application by one of the cattle stations to clear 4000 ha or something, all of a sudden, a green group comes out and says, no way. Is the government being driven by the Greens? I am not saying they should not have an involvement in the discussion, but has that been weighted too heavily in their favour. I have always said I will support quality clearing, not broad scale clearing. I have never agreed with this, like with the original Tipperary.

I came to the Daly in 1970, and when I drove down the road to the Daly, what is called the Foster Block, they cleared everything, creeks, the lot. That was 30 years ago. I would have known even then that that was not the way to clear from my studies at my horticultural college. The science has been around. It is not something new. It is not as though the government now is discovering something new. We live in a high rainfall area. We know about soil erosion. We know all that; that is not new. We should be able to apply those basic principles to some of these smaller applications for clearing as long as it is not broad scale, it is just simply adding to the farm. We could probably be here all day discussing that, minister.

I am concerned about the future of agriculture, and I am not talking about the Tipperary clearing for miles, is somehow being threatened a little by people who do not even want to see a couple of trees knocked over. If you want to lock the Territory up as national park, let us lock it up as national park. If you want to develop it, do it sensibly, but send a signal to the people out there that we will allow the Territory to grow, it will not all be locked up, so they know what their future is. I am a bit worried at the moment that people are concerned that clearing is sort of something of a big no no, now with the government.

Mr KIELY: I will have to get minister Vatskalis and minister Natt out. I think they send the messages out about where to do business.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I will move on. The other will be gamba grass. As you know, it is the recommendation of the good chairman here next to me, the member for Goyder, and his committee. Has the government given any consideration - and it might be mentioned even in the recommendations or I did see it the other day - of classifying gamba in a special category where, basically, anyone who wished to grow it had to be licensed to grow it with conditions on that licence?

Mr KIELY: I thank the member for Goyder for the good work that he did on the invasive species, and the member for Arnhem, another member of the committee. It was and is a great report, and one that the agency is working its way through. It did cover a lot of ground and there are a lot of good points in there, and a lot of work that we are already doing, might I say.

The issue of gamba grass – a letter from two noted scientists telling me that it is no good. The actions of the Western Australian government and their outright ban, I believe it is; the actions of the Queensland government and their management of gamba. Gamba was introduced in the 1940s, heavily promoted in the 1970s, taken up and used by pastoralists around the place. Properties have changed hands, no longer have cattle grazing on it. Parks have been established, roadways have gone through. Gamba has been used as mulch and travelling all over the place into areas where it was never meant to be. Lots of people over this side think it should be declared a weed, and people over that side are saying it is a great feed for cattle and the backbone of the cattle industry. There are many factors.

Right now we are going hard at it. We are working through all these different, competing issues that have been put on the table. We understand the position of a large number of users of gamba. We understand the position of many people who see it as a big threat to the biodiversity of the Northern Territory; to savannah lands, given the height it can get to the increased fuel load, the heat of the fire, reaching up into the canopy of the woodlands and destroying that, and the chance of bringing on a monoculture. All these views and all this data has been put before us.

We are working on getting a position, a plan of management, as to what it takes on and what form. We are gathering the data now. We are going through the cost benefit analysis. When I say a cost benefit analysis, you know one hectare of gamba can feed 10 cattle, but what then is the cost to the biodiversity around the place. All this has been confronted by the professional people within this agency; they are working on it. I believe it is across government as well. They will get their findings in to me. I talk to them quite regularly about this, because it is an issue that many people have a lot of interest in. They will get that in to me, and then we will make our decisions based on that. If you want a bit more – well, you are pretty well across the issues of gamba, member for Nelson. I can get Dr Leeder to walk us through a whole lot ...

Mr WOOD: I used to have a block of land at Adelaide River that was covered in it and I sold it because I could not manage it. The next bloke said he would ...

Mr KIELY: Did you dig it out before you sold it?

Mr WOOD: No. It never was on my block, and that is how far it spread. When I first came, no gamba. About six years later, gamba everywhere.

Minister, could I just make a suggestion out of left field. When I was on the council, I remember writing an article about gamba and saying that if we really believe in sustainable agriculture, then it is the people of Litchfield - in this case - that were paying the cost of that sustainable agriculture by having to maintain and spray roadsides to get rid of gamba grass, which was costing a lot of money. A suggestion might be that those people who use gamba grass, for instance, live cattle export, there is a levy per cow that is exported, it might be 50¢ or \$1, which goes, basically, into a fund to help manage gamba grass in areas outside of the pastoral property. It is going to take a huge amount of effort to get rid of gamba. It came here as a pastoral species. People are making money fattening cattle on that species, while local government councils have to fork out substantial amounts of money. I imagine the government has to pay large amounts of money

trying to control gamba grass. Anyone who has been down Amy Johnson Drive will have seen how many times they have sprayed it, and Tiger Brennan Drive, and seen how much gamba still grows there. There are still heaps and heaps of it. I believe we need something that says: 'Yes, you are getting a benefit, but the rest of our community is paying through its taxes to try to control this pest'. That, then, at least puts some value in the term 'sustainable agriculture'.

Mr KIELY: You might have noticed, as you were putting forward that suggestion, that the people from the agency were busily writing. We are ...

Mr WOOD: I am not against the pastoral industry. They will probably say: 'Ooh, ooh, ooh', but it is a reality of life.

Mr KIELY: Yes, it goes to the complexity of the management of gamba grass and a whole range of issues.

Mr WOOD: Could I move on quickly then. What is happening with buffel? Was there any discussion the same as for gamba?

Mr KIELY: Buffel is not currently declared as a weed.

Mr WOOD: The same as gamba, but it causes similar problems.

Mr KIELY: Buffel has been assessed as having high weed risk under the NT Weed Risk Management System. Work, too, is being undertaken on a cost-benefit analysis for the species. Perhaps Dr Leeder can inform us a bit more on buffel?

Dr LEEDER: One of the issues we have with buffel is that it has not been declared anywhere yet, whereas gamba has been declared in other areas. So, there has been some precedent for the actual declaration of a pasture species. As the minister said, we are looking at the cost-benefit analysis for that as well for a number of species. The cost-benefit analysis model is one that we were developing. Last year, we developed a Weed Risk Management System so that we were able to bring a scientific approach to assessing any of the plants that were considered as potential weeds, or we wanted to know the extent of their 'weediness' and the ability to manage them. Part of that program was then to develop a cost-benefit analysis model to use in conjunction with the Weed Risk Management System. The model has not been totally developed yet. Certainly, buffel and a number of other plants that were put through the pilot of the Weed Risk Management System will be run through that cost-benefit analysis before we then look at the best ways to manage those grasses. There is no doubt that there needs to be management options for it. This is actually looking at those as the outcomes from those two schemes.

Mr WOOD: I do not want to go through every weed in the list, but one weed - well, it is not a weed, I have it growing at my property, but I know what it likes to do and seed - is the neem tree. It was brought into the Territory not that long ago, and I think it was the great saviour for mosquitoes.

Mr KIELY: Mosquito, wasn't it?

Mr WOOD: Mosquitoes, yes. I gather it is all up and down the Victoria River. I do not know whether it is on the Daly River, but ...

Mrs MILLER: Katherine River.

Mr WOOD: Katherine River. I would be interested to know if you could give us some update on the neem in relation to its spread, and in relation to whether the government thinks it should be declared a weed and not sold at nurseries?

Mr KIELY: It is a very broadranging question. We do not have that data with us. We are happy to take it on notice.

Question on Notice No 8.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, if you could restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Minister, could you please tell the Estimates Committee the state of neem trees throughout the Northern Territory? Would it be a plant that the government would consider classifying as a weed? Would you also consider banning it from sale at nurseries?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 8.7.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I hope this is the right area. We have not talked about cane toads for a while. Has the department been monitoring the effects of the cane toad in relation to wildlife? There was a lot of discussion years ago about it not having an effect on some animals, and that they would recover, but do we have up-to-date information today on the effect of the cane toad in the Territory in relation to the native species?

Mr KIELY: I can tell you ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you going to deal with this under this section?

Mr KIELY: Is it under invasive?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, it is Natural Resource Assessments, we are actually under that output group. I mean, I am happy to.

Mr WOOD: Why did I pick that? I must have had a reason.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Environment and Sustainability might be ...

Mr KIELY: No, we will keep it to the right output, if you do not mind, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: All right. Which output should it be?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was wondering whether it should be in Environment and Sustainability, which is Output 4.1.

Mr WOOD: All right, I can put in there, minister, if you like?

Mr KIELY: No, we have it.

Mr WOOD: You have it done?

Mr KIELY: Everyone is nodding. It is fixed.

Mr WOOD: So I can get ...

Mr KIELY: So the question is the monitoring of cane toads and their effect on ...

Mr WOOD: Native species.

Mr KIELY: ... native species. All right, before I go to the experts in this field, I have to tell you, on introduced species, member for Nelson, that my dog licked a cane toad last night. Dogs do not hallucinate; they froth a lot. They cost you \$150 at an after hours vet. So, they are out there. Dogs are getting into them and ...

Mr WOOD: My dogs are more intelligent than your dogs. They would not touch them.

Mr KIELY: You will have to get yours over and show us.

Mr WOOD: That is right, yes. They are rural dogs, they have sense.

Mr KIELY: That was an introduced species.

Mr WOOD: Of dog?

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr WOOD: I thought so, yes.

Mr KIELY: But for the effects of cane toads on native animals, Dr Dixon might take that.

Dr DIXON: Dale Dixon, Acting Executive Director Biodiversity Conservation. Member for Nelson, I would like to point out that toads have been present in Queensland since 1947, and no animals have become extinct because of cane toads. We are currently monitoring the impact of cane toads on freshwater crocodiles in Arnhem Land. Advice from traditional owners is that crocodiles in the Liverpool River area have not become extinct as a result of the arrival of the cane toads. We will be going there again this year, once we can get to the area, because the waters have to go down to further survey those populations. In terms of other organisms, we have a captive program for northern quolls. We have translocated quolls off the mainland to islands around Arnhem Land and the captive-bred animals are re-establishing to the wild.

Mr WOOD: Through you, minister, what is the state of the sand monitor? Also, Ian Morris was on television or in the newspaper the other day saying that the king brown was certainly at threat from cane toads. Is there any accuracy in those reports?

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant will be able to answer that.

Mr GRANT: We do not have Dr Greg Leach, who is the expert on this stuff. There is no doubt that quolls or the water monitors are affected by the first wave of cane toads, that some animals do eat them and die. The evidence seems to be, certainly in the case of water monitors, that there are a number of animals that do not eat them and the population does seem to recover.

Mr WOOD: Are you talking about the big fellow, the one that the Aboriginal people used to eat?

Mr GRANT: There was a big effect on those when cane toads first arrived. But, it seems to have reached a plateau and started to increase.

Mr WOOD: I know before they arrived at Fogg Dam there was a fairly intensive survey of all the animals that lived there. I would imagine they should have been able to survey them afterwards. Has there been any report on the effect of cane toads in Fogg Dam? There were two scientists working on that project who lived at the old Middle Point village.

Mr GRANT: I think we have to take that on notice because it is referring to a specific survey.

Question on Notice No 8.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Minister, would you be able to find out any details of research that was done at Fogg Dam? I believe University of Wollongong researchers were studying the numbers of animals at Fogg Dam and studying the effect of cane toads on those numbers. As we have had cane toads for about three to four years, I was wondering if any report has come out to show us whether they did have an effect. It was fairly detailed research work. I think nearly every snake had tags on them.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Before you go too far with further information, member for Nelson - are you happy to take that question on notice, minister?

Mr KIELY: Yes, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 8.8.

Mr KIELY: Mr Chairman, I will respond to a couple of questions on notice. Question No 8.5 – for the member for Katherine – repairs and maintenance on bioparks for the years requested is on the schedule provided earlier. Will that suffice?

Mrs MILLER: That is fine, thank you.

Mr KIELY: Question on notice No 8.6 – I will table it if you like. It is Strategic Assessment Programs.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, if you could table that one. Thank you, minister.

Mr WOOD: Is the visitor number one still getting mono-coloured? I have no more questions for this section.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Natural Resource Management Activities

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 3.2, Natural Resource Management Activities. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the Northern Territory produces the highest per capita of greenhouse gas in Australia. Of this, what percentage of this greenhouse gas comes from bushfires? How successful have you been in managing bushfires? Have you been able to reduce that?

Mr KIELY: The contribution of savannah burning to our overall emissions total is 35%.

Mrs MILLER: That is savannah burning?

Mr KIELY: Yes, that is the sort of bushfires we get. How successful we are? Actually we have been pretty good with the work we have done with the Bushfires Council, with a record increase in the budget enabling them to do that - they have 1000 volunteers and I like getting behind them and making sure that they are well resourced. Something like \$2m has gone into Bushfires NT, which is great. I would like Dr Leeder to talk about WAFMA, because you talk about managing fires and savannah burning and everything - this is a great news story which should go on to the record.

Dr LEEDER: The department, through Bushfires NT, is involved in the WAFMA program, which is the West Arnhem Fire Management Agreement, which was established following a decade of research and funded both by the Territory government and the Australian government into fire and vegetation management. Through this agreement, the Darwin Liquid Natural Gas is able to gain offsets for greenhouse gas emissions. They have a requirement to offset 100 000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year as part of the exceptional development permit. This project works with the traditional owners in West Arnhem Land to reintroduce early Dry Season fires into the region so that the greenhouse gas emissions per unit are reduced, and they have been reduced by more than 50% through this program. Early Dry Season fires also create breaks that stop the intense late Dry Season fires, which have previously been more devastating and resulted in higher greenhouse gas emissions. Each year, there is a calculation of the amount of emission reduction from the 10 year baseline, and in 2007, the abatement was 184 376 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, which is an advance on the annual targeted minimum abatement of 100 000 tonnes.

These principles which have been used in WAFMA, we are looking at trying to use in similar sorts of programs so that, through the fire management programs, there can be a considerable reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions from bushfires.

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, I also alluded to that additional \$2m funding this year, 2008-09, I can give a break up on that: \$236 000 will go on volunteer training; \$95 000 will go on volunteer support; \$227 000 will go to the volunteer brigades; the fire fighting fleet will have \$882 000; the radio network, which you can imagine is critical to the safety and the success of firefighting, \$365 000; there are two new fire patrol positions which have been established in the busiest parts of the Territory, \$105 000; and \$90 000 has gone towards fire suppression, which will allow an air tractor water bomber to become a permanent facility when used.

We also have the cost of wildfires which has continued to rise over the years. Fires burned out 242 000 km² of the Territory in 2007, and the average area of burning is around 150 000 km², so it is quite

significant. The last fire season included 39 fire ban days - that was more than twice the average - we did have exceptional fuel loads and extreme weather conditions, which contributed to that. The bushfire program volunteers saved a substantial number of houses. All in all, we owe a great debt of gratitude to those 1000 volunteers for what they do. We fund them, we are working with them, and we look forward to their continued success.

Mrs MILLER: The bushfire volunteers do an absolutely outstanding job. There is no question about that. They give up their time to ensure we are safe. Minister, regarding the West Arnhem Fire Abatement Strategy, are there any other groups or companies looking at fire abatement to offset carbon?

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant.

Mr GRANT: My understanding is that there are quite a lot of companies that are looking for greenhouse offsets. I also believe the federal government is looking at funding some of those offsets as well. We are in the relatively early stages of that because we do not have an established carbon market.

Mrs MILLER: Right. So, you are expecting in this next 12 months that there would be more inquiries in relation to carbon offsets?

Mr GRANT: It might be 12 months plus. We need to get the next version of Kyoto clear, and that will then be going to the carbon offset.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. In your Natural Resource Management Activities, you dropped the number of your strategic programs from last year from 22 to 19. Are you able to tell me which programs you have cut, or is it similar to the last output where they are different programs that run over different budget periods and it is a little difficult to do that?

Mr KIELY: The strategic program is the weeds of national significance, 11 species - planning and program implementation, including a national lead role for Athel pine and mimosa; the non-weeds of national significance - there are seven priority species: rubber bush, Ngurra Burr, gamba, mission, Chinese ...

Mrs MILLER: Excuse me, minister. I do not mean to be rude, but are you going to read the whole lot of them?

Mr KIELY: That was my intention.

Mrs MILLER: No, I wanted to know what programs you have cut. There are three which have been cut and I wanted know the ones that have been cut.

Mr KIELY: Sure thing.

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr KIELY: The published 2007-08 figures for strategic programs was 22.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that is true.

Mr KIELY: The decline includes the reassessment of the bushfires project from 10 to 6 by amalgamating Alice Springs East and Alice Springs West into one program, Alice Springs; incorporating Barkly, Elliott and Wauchope into one program, Tennant Creek; and amalgamating Katherine, VRD and Gulf into the program Savannah; merging Tier 1 and Tier 2 range length programs into Monitoring; and including the two biodiversity programs previously incorrectly recorded under Natural Resource Assessments.

Mrs MILLER: Right. So, those programs are run now under the one management?

Mr KIELY: Yes, they are all being run and given different titles.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. I believe that is all for Natural Resource Management. I have another one, but I do not know if it fits under this. I will give it a whirl. Minister, the member for Nelson spoke before of the quoll and it being protected on an offshore area. Have you been approached by any other governments within Australia to have a location, like an offshore island, for endangered species?

Mr KIELY: Not to my knowledge, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: No, it is not a trick question, I am just asking because ...

Mr KIELY: No, I am not trying to find a tricky answer to that, but no, we do not.

Mrs MILLER: It is just that it has been very successful with the quoll, and some of the other endangered mammals. I was wondering if you would have been approached to locate them on an offshore island.

Mr KIELY: Mr Grant might have a bit to add.

Mr GRANT: Quite a lot of endangered animals are saved on islands around Australia. I mentioned before about the Greater Stick-nest Rat and some of those other ones off Western Australia but, because of the habitats in Australia, it tends to be fairly specific to states. The drier, cooler animals stay on drier, cooler islands, etcetera. We would develop that strategy as the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: I just noticed it is getting a bit of media attention lately, and I just wondered if you had been approached. Thank you.

Mr KIELY: I could just say that the Northern Quoll Ark Project is fantastic. The results ...

Mrs MILLER: The?

Mr KIELY: The quolls.

Mrs MILLER: Absolutely.

Mr KIELY: Yes, it is just wonderful.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, any questions?

Mr WOOD: Output 3.2?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in relation to back burning in Bushfires Council controlled areas, who actually decides when land should be back burned? Is that the volunteers, or does management make that assessment?

Dr LEEDER: Decisions like that are made by the fire wardens or the fire controller at the time.

Mr WOOD: Right. And that is a local person or someone ...

Dr LEEDER: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Through you, minister, is there some scientific basis, and I use that fairly broadly, to say when land should be back burned? You occasionally see letters in the paper down Darwin River way saying: 'What are they doing? We have a whole section of bush that has been blackened'. I understand they have a role to play in protecting property; we have to also consider that. Is there some sort of guidelines as to how late in the season we should be burning? I saw, it was not the Bushfires Council, but they burnt near Coonawarra Naval Base the other day. We are nearly into the middle of the year, and you have to wonder if we are picking the right times to burn. Are there any scientific or other guidelines as to when burning should occur?

Dr LEEDER: My understanding from that is that there are certainly some standard protocols and guidelines, and that it is also aligned with landholders' responsibilities in terms of creating fire breaks and so on. Unfortunately, many people in the rural area do not necessarily comply with that at the time, and so you do get some follow up action requiring people to do their fire breaks, which then relates to whether other back burning becomes necessary. It is probably a fairly complicated answer in terms of it being partly people complying with their responsibilities under the *Bushfires Act*, partly the standards that have been

established through the Bushfires Council in terms of local knowledge and awareness related to the climatic conditions each year, but, yes, there would be a specific approach to it, it is not just ad hoc.

Mr KIELY: I believe the CSIRO undertook a study to advocate earlier burns.

Mr WOOD: They did all the Kapalga experimental work. There has been a lot of discussion about having late burns. Then you run into issues about burning when plants are not ready for burning.

My last question, minister: do you think we should have two fire brigades, or should we actually unite them?

Mr KIELY: That might be a question you should put to the ...

Mr WOOD: No, it is a political question. You cannot pass it off to your staff there.

Mr KIELY: No, I am not putting to my staff. Fire control comes under the Police, Fire and Emergency Services minister. The responsibility for us is the NT Bushfires Council. It is working. I would have to consider any proposal based on all the data put before us; seeing the best outcomes for the people and property around and what would gain the best result for combating and managing fire. When that is all before me, I will be more than prepared to make a decision and come out with a decision.

Mr WOOD: I know the rough reasons for having the two. One looks after the bigger blocks and the other looks after more rural blocks. The two in the Litchfield area intermingle a fair bit. I did not know whether there has been any consideration, and I am not going to die on the sword for it if it does not happen; but just wondering whether, for the sake of uniformity, perhaps efficiency, and providing equipment and ...

Mr KIELY: Public safety would be the thing that would drive me to any decision, member for Nelson, but I have not had a case put to me.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Output 3.3 – Flood Forecasting

Mr CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 3.3, Flood Forecasting. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. It would be nice if we could forecast one of these in advance, wouldn't it, instead of getting caught in it? Minister, has any research been done on the vulnerability on Middle Arm and East Arm from storm surge? What is the exposure to premises built there to storm surge?

Mr KIELY: I will ask Mr Gilmore to tackle that one, please.

Mr GILMORE: John Gilmour, Executive Director, land and Water. Your question was about Middle Arm and ...?

Mrs MILLER: And East Arm, from storm surge.

Mr GILMORE: There have been a number of studies done within the Northern Territory over a number of years. There was a report, the IPAC report, probably about 10 years ago, which estimated the probabilities of storm surge levels in Darwin Harbour, which includes Middle Point and East Arm. With the assistance of the Commonwealth government, there have also been some reviews of those reports, and the government is looking to review those reports at the moment. When major development projects occur in Darwin Harbour, such as the Waterfront development or Bayview Haven, Cullen Bay, the LNG plant, included in the requirements for the assessment of those projects is to do an assessment of the impact of storm surge on those projects. It is certainly taken into account in planning of major projects and in the general planning of Darwin.

Mrs MILLER: It is fairly important in this day and age where they are predicting global warming as the sea levels are supposed to rise. Thank you. Minister, when does the moratorium on the flood mitigation dam in Alice Springs expire?

Mr KIELY: Mr Gilmour.

Mr GILMORE: I do not have that information before me, but we can certainly provide that.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Would you like to put that on notice, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: Yes. Thank you.

Question on Notice No 8.9

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you could restate the question, please?

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, when does the moratorium on a flood mitigation dam in Alice Springs expire?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.9.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. That is all I have for this output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. For *Hansard*, I acknowledge the member for Braitling has replaced the member for Nelson.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, do you have any questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes I do, and forgive me if I repeat the question that was just asked because I missed it. You have a voluntary bore metering program in the Darwin rural area. Could you tell me how many people have actually taken that up, and where it is at?

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are on flood forecasting.

Mrs BRAHAM: Oh, okay. I thought that ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Next one is Water Resources.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is this Output 3.4?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 3.3.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have not missed anything.

Mrs BRAHAM: What have you lot been doing with the time?

Mr KIELY: I am sure we will have that information ready for you when it arises.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are we doing Output 3.3?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Did you mention the one in Alice Springs? Has that been asked of you, minister?

Mr KIELY: Which one?

Mrs BRAHAM: I believe you announced the Todd flood forecasting last year, wasn't it, in Alice Springs. Could you tell us ...

Mrs MILLER: No, I already asked that one too.

Mrs BRAHAM: You have asked that?

Mrs MILLER: I have asked about the moratorium on the flood mitigation dam in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, but this was the flood forecasting. Perhaps we could get an update of where we are at with that?

Mr KIELY: Flood forecasting for the Todd for Alice?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, I know it sounds crazy.

Mr KIELY: No, no. I have seen that river flood and actually I ...

Mrs BRAHAM: So have I.

Mr KIELY: I was down there and had a good briefing on what they are doing there. I will defer to the expert in this field, Mr Gilmore.

Mr GILMORE: We do have a flood forecasting system for the Todd River. That includes a number of gauging stations in the Todd River and rainfall stations. We work cooperatively with the Bureau of Meteorology in forecasting floods. Over the last two years, we have sought to, what we call 'harden' the forecasting system for the Todd River catchment. We have recently upgraded what we call the Wiggly's Gorge station. We have replaced those with new stations, tried to vandal-proof them as much as we can, because you may be aware, vandals have been a problem there in the past. We have also put in some new telemetered rainfall and river data in that area, and hardened our telemetry systems. We are fairly confident - when I say confident - our system is much stronger now forecasting floods in the Todd River.

However, you might be aware that floods in the Todd River can occur very quickly in what we call flash flooding, and they can be difficult to forecast with significant time warnings, such as enlarged rivers. We certainly have the information to provide as early a warning as possible in that catchment.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, when was the last time we actually had a flood in Alice Springs?

Mr KIELY: Not when the river was flowing, but when there was a flood?

Mrs BRAHAM: When it came up over the river banks, onto the streets.

Mr KIELY: I thought you were a local.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am. I might know. I am just asking you.

Mr KIELY: Mr Gilmore.

Mr GILMORE: I do not have that information before me. We can provide you with the list of the floods, because each flood has its own characteristics and height. We have what we call floods that occur on the average once every five years, or once every 10 years, or once every 20 years, etcetera. We know the heights at certain points, such as the gauging station near the Anzac Oval. We can give you that height, and also compare that height to what we call different flood scenarios on Alice Springs. We can provide that for you.

Mrs BRAHAM: What is the cost of implementing and maintaining the system?

Mr KIELY: Do we have those figures available?

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry, I am being a bit tongue in cheek, aren't I? I am interested in how much it cost to set it up and how much it costs to maintain it?

Mr GILMORE: I do not have the specific figures for the Todd River, but the typical figures for flood forecasting to set up a station to measure the height of the river and provide that information to a data system in Alice Springs is in the order of \$50 000 to \$60 000. Each station, to set one up is \$50 000 to \$60 000. For just a rainfall station is in the order of \$10 000 to \$15 000 within a catchment. The typical cost of maintenance for one of those stations per year – typical, because they can vary - is in the order of \$6000 to \$8000 a year. Those costs are whether it rains or not.

Mrs BRAHAM: I just smile, minister. We have had about half an inch of rain since Christmas time. I cannot remember when we had the last big flood. I know there was one in 1974, and one in 1988. The town has changed in the way it has been built and, yes, there may be damage done to some of the new subdivisions if they are based too low. I just smile about the concept of having a flood warning system in Alice Springs when we have had such a low rainfall for many years. Perhaps you could give us a forecast. When do you think our next flood would be?

Mr KIELY: I have not seen the Todd flow more than three times. Unfortunately, we are not ...

Mrs BRAHAM: And you are still up here?

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: You know that the myth is? See it flow three times and you will never leave Alice.

Mr KIELY: I love Alice. I love getting down there. It is a beautiful place.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. I am sorry, minister; I am being lighthearted. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 – Water Resources

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on the much anticipated Output 3.4, Water Resources.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, in your budget, what is the \$51m at Manton Dam being spent on?

Mr KIELY: This is in our budget? When you say ...

Mrs MILLER: What is it being spent on?

Mr KIELY: When you say 'your budget' are you are talking about the NRETA budget?

Mrs MILLER: I presume it is your budget – Output 3.4, Water Resources.

Mr KIELY: We are searching for that information.

Mrs MILLER: What are you going to spend it on?

Mr KIELY: Well, we are not sure that we have it. \$51m? Could you direct us to a page in the Budget Paper?

Mrs MILLER: I am about to find out myself.

Mr KIELY: Our total budget is, how much, \$126m?

Mrs MILLER: Well, make sure you have it there. I have to find it in my fact sheet here.

Mr KIELY: While you are having a look - it would help us out - the total budget for Natural Resources, Water Resources, is \$11m.

Mrs MILLER: It is obviously Infrastructure too, but do you know what it is?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If it is not within the minister's realm of responsibility, or his department, it is a bit hard to ask that question, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I thought he might have known. I will come back to that later.

Mr KIELY: Yes. We would be happy to answer it.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, was not the original plan to raise the wall of Darwin River Dam? What has happened to that original plan?

Mr KIELY: We are not in a position to answer that; it is Power and Water.

Mr CHAIRMAN: They are still to come, though.

Mrs MILLER: I know they are still to come. So you will not be able to answer this one either: how is the work on Manton Dam going to increase the water capacity to Darwin? Is that is Power and Water too?

Mr KIELY: It is.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. What levels does the Darwin River Dam have to fall to before water quality is affected?

Mr KIELY: You have to save that one too, I am afraid; it is not in my portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: I will be up all day tomorrow on Power and Water. We are still on Output 3.4? No, that is all of my questions, thank you, reserved until tomorrow.

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I would like to ask a couple.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Of course, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, how many bore licences are there in the Alice Springs town boundary? I will say it that way so you can find it.

Mr KIELY: Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: I will have to take that on notice, minister, I do not have the number of licences.

Mr KIELY: Would you like to that on notice or would you like to ...

Mrs BRAHAM: You do not have it?

Dr LEEDER: The number of ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Are they voluntary or – it is my understanding that they are now compulsory, to have a new bore?

Dr LEEDER: To have a licence for it? I am sorry I do not have the detail of that.

Question on Notice No 8.10

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, would you like to ask the question again?

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me how many bores are in the town boundary of Alice Springs? Are they licensed or unlicensed? Voluntary or non-voluntary, oh, it cannot be non-voluntary.

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

Mr KIELY: Yes, sure.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.10.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, regarding bores, what is the department's policy now? Do you put meters on bores, and do you charge people for the water they are extracting from the bores?

Mr KIELY: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: Not meters, no meters?

Mr KIELY: I will give it to Dr Leeder.

Dr LEEDER: Within the Darwin and Katherine area, there is a voluntary metering program for bores, and it is a voluntary program, used so that we can actually assess the range of different uses within the stock and domestic water allocations so that it will be useful information for overall water planning. There are no charges for the volume of water extracted or for the licences.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many of those voluntary bore metering programs do you have in the Darwin rural area?

Dr LEEDER: We have 47.

Mrs BRAHAM: Forty seven?

Dr LEEDER: Forty seven meters, yes, in that program.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do residents who volunteer to have a bore meter put on pay for the installation?

Dr LEEDER: The Australian Water Fund is paying for the purchase of the meters.

Mrs BRAHAM: So who installs them?

Dr LEEDER: Our staff install them.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, it is done by the department?

Dr LEEDER: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is what I am trying to get a picture of. You have this voluntary program up here. Have you extended it to the Centre?

Dr LEEDER: At this stage, I do not believe it has been extended to the Centre.

Mrs BRAHAM: What about pastoral properties and communities?

Dr LEEDER: You come into the different types of bores in communities, whether it is a stock and domestic bore, or what sort it is. I do not have the detail. I am comfortable to find that detail across the Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM: So we really do not have any idea of how much water is being extracted for domestic or agricultural and pastoral use?

Dr LEEDER: Anyone who has a bore is required to provide the information, in terms of what information they have from it, but no, that is perfectly true. We do not have an adequate picture of the extraction, which is why there is the voluntary project in the Darwin area, where there is a greater pressure on the water resources. Certainly, we would like to be able to spread it out into other areas, and where there are areas where there is pressure on the resources, then we look for methods like that to be able to determine, within the water allocation basin.

Mrs BRAHAM: I imagine it would probably be worthwhile knowing just how much water is being extracted, particularly from the crucial areas. What bores access the water basin in Todd River? How many bores access that water, and has the level dropped considerably over recent times, because we have not had it flow?

Mr KIELY: Is that bores in the Todd River?

Mrs BRAHAM: There are bores which access the water basin in the Todd River. I believe this gentleman might know. No, well he is looking as though he did.

Mr GILMOUR: No. There are bores in the Mereenie field, which are to the south of The Gap, where water for Alice Springs is extracted. There are also monitoring bores in what we call the town basin, which is north of The Gap. I am not quite sure what your specific question was.

Mrs BRAHAM: I was thinking of the ones north. For instance, does the Golf Course Estate access the water there?

Mr KIELY: They come out of the town bore, do they?

Mr GILMORE: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is the town basin. Could I put that on notice, minister?

Mr KIELY: We are happy to give you that data, but if you would rather put the question on notice?

Mrs BRAHAM: Are you happy to take it?

Question on Notice No 8.11

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, if you could re-state the question?

Mrs BRAHAM: How many bores access water in the Todd River town basin, and where are they located?

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

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 8.11.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, this is a member for Nelson one. It is from your Statement of Corporate Intent. Could you please explain this paragraph: 'Last year's SCI included plans to extend licensed groundwater extraction from the Howard East Borefield to provide additional capacity and maintain diversity of emergency water supplies. It now appears unlikely that the Controller of Water Resources will approve this application in sufficient time, if at all'. I am not sure who the Controller of Water Resources is.

Mr KIELY: I hope Dr Leeder will be able to respond to this.

Dr LEEDER: If you wouldn't mind reading it again, member for Braitling, I am not quite sure of the ...

Mrs BRAHAM: This is the Statement of Corporate Intent from Power and Water. It is to do with the Howard East Borefield.

Dr LEEDER: That question needs to be asked of Power and Water.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. That is all for the moment from me.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, member for Braitling.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, can I clarify for the question that I asked on the \$51m, it is the Manton Dam upgrade. It is under significant new capital works in 2008-09, \$51m.

Mr KIELY: That is Power and Water, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I will ask them. There is one other question: I was wondering, through the minister, if I could get Mr Gilmore to table that IPAC storm surge report that I have never seen?

Mr GILMORE: It is a large report of this sort of size.

Mrs MILLER: That is okay.

Mr GILMORE: What we could do is forward that to you. It is a separate issue that was ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Perhaps we will do it that way, instead of requiring it to be tabled.

Mrs MILLER: I would be happy with that, thank you. So, can I request that one of those be forwarded to me, minister?

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, that concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0. We might have a short break, minister, if you would like to, unless you would like to keep going?

Mr KIELY: No one else is flagging, are they?

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY **Output 4.1 - Environment and Sustainability**

Mr CHAIRMAN: If everyone is happy, we will keep going then. The committee will proceed to Output Group 4.0, Environment and Sustainability; Output 4.1, Environment and Sustainability.

Mr KIELY: Mr Chairman, I would like to introduce Ms Lyn Allen, the Executive Director, Environment, Heritage and the Arts, who will be joining us at the table.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Member for Katherine, any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Where are we now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 4.1, Environment and Sustainability.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what are you doing to educate the younger generation towards the reduction of global warming?

Mr KIELY: Are we talking about COOLMob?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr KIELY: All right. We are doing quite a lot, not only through this portfolio, but across government. Specifically, areas like COOLMob are doing a great job in educating our young. I will ask Ms Allen to go over it, because it is a good story I would like to share.

Ms ALLEN: Lyn Allen, Executive Director, Environment, Heritage and the Arts. You will be aware, member for Katherine, that the government has had a greenhouse strategy for action for some time. It runs out this year, 2008, and the Chief Minister announced earlier in the year that there would be a new policy for the Northern Territory going forward. I am confident that that policy will again set out the sort of work that we might do with schools. Our own department has spent quite a lot of time, a bit through our Re-thinking Waste program, but with the connection through to greenhouse gases and energy reform and waste. Directly, we have something like \$20 000 in schools grants this financial year again and that has been continuing. As the minister says, COOLMob has been doing its work for audits, and I believe has extended that work into schools now. Jo Kieboom picked up a Melaleuca Award last night for her role in that for Power and Water. I think we will see still more work done. In our output for this year, we have \$2m that the government has put towards household and small business work on climate change and energy efficiency. I am sure some of that will be for schools or for children. We have not yet organised what that program will look like.

Mr KIELY: Also, we have the Environment Grants which go into schools directly and sustain the schools in all these types of different programs assisting our young become aware. Might I say, member for Katherine, there was a report out of the United States, I believe, where they said that young children are pretty fearful about climate change, and a lot of the media attention. I feel that we, as grown ups, have the

requirement to teach our children about climate change, and the need to watch our resource usage and to use it appropriately. We also need to teach our children that if we do act in a sensible manner that we can turn things around; that we can live healthy, productive and safe lives. A lot of the message, unfortunately, in some areas, to get people switched on to climate change, can have a pretty negative effect and have more of a scaring than an educating effect on our children.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, yes, we do need to set an example and do everything we can for our children. What sort of car do you drive?

Mr KIELY: What output is that?

Mrs MILLER: You are Environment, what sort of car do you drive?

Mr KIELY: I do not really see the relevance.

Mr CHAIRMAN: One, it does not come within this department. Two, it ...

Mrs MILLER: It is called a gas guzzler. Is that what it is?

Mr KIELY: I do not think that is the brand name.

Mrs MILLER: I have one too, it is a gas guzzler – not very environmentally friendly. We need to set an example.

Minister, could you table your guidelines for management of the fifth floor's carbon footprint, as the minister for the Environment? Do you have a fifth floor carbon footprint?

Mr KIELY: That might be more of a question for Madam Speaker, or DCM.

Mrs MILLER: As the minister for the Environment, you are not encouraging the fifth floor to ...

Mr KIELY: I encourage everyone every day ...

Mrs MILLER: ... become environmentally sustainable and friendly?

Mr KIELY: Member for Katherine, that is not in this portfolio, it is not in this output.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr KIELY: I do not have that information. It is not an area that is my responsibility.

Mr MILLS: It is education, is it not?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can we stick to the questions, please?

Mr KIELY: I am happy, and it has been going pretty well so far. I am more than happy to assist you.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, you probably do not know the answer to this one either: how is the government's carbon emission reduction strategy going? Surely, as minister for the Environment, you would know, because last year you failed to meet your targets, so what about this year? Where is it in the annual report? It is government's carbon emission reduction.

Mr KIELY: That is a question more appropriate for the minister for DPI.

Mrs MILLER: I have had a lot of buck passing here today. So that is for DPI. Do you know what your personal carbon footprint is then, minister?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is clearly out of order, member for Katherine.

Mr KIELY: Are you asking about me, as in my volume on earth; or would you like to know what our agency itself is doing?

Mrs MILLER: That would be fine. I would love to know what your agency is doing.

Mr KIELY: And we are here to assist – Ms Milikins?

Ms MILIKINS: The department, with the help of the Environment and Heritage and Arts Division, established a green team that is working throughout the department. We have managed to go to quote and obtain what they call an environmental auditor, who is actually on deck this week, an expert environmental auditor who is doing that work that you were just talking about and measuring the department's environmental footprint, and creating measures and benchmarks for us to be able to measure that and report on that on a regular basis. They will come back again at a staged time in the future to re-measure that. Unfortunately, as the auditor is there this week, we do not have the results of that audit.

The department has taken a strong approach to its fleet. We have, as you might imagine, quite a large fleet, given the spread of the agency. All the executive directors and the chief executives have undertaken to replace their vehicles with four-cylinders and Prius vehicles. Most of those transfers are either taking place or the replacement vehicles have been ordered through Northern Territory Fleet and we are waiting on them. They are looking at rolling that program out across the agencies, certainly across as many levels as we can. We need to get some advice, possibly through NT Fleet or from an expert, as to how far we can go with that in some of our outlying areas and our special need vehicles. I will just see if I can find the actual report I have on it so I do not miss something.

Our energy use in our buildings has increased a small bit since last year. We have measured our owned buildings, and NT Property Management has been involved in measuring our leased buildings. However, the areas where it has increased are our on-the-ground commercial facilities where we are subject to visitor numbers, such as the museums and art galleries, where the more visitors we get through we get an increase. We have had some marked reductions. The Goyder Centre at Palmerston has reduced by 10%; Strehlow Research Centre by 11%; the Tom Hare Building in Alice Springs by 5.1%; and Darwin Plaza by 6%. There has been a concerted effort across the department. We have some very passionate staff, as you might imagine, in this area who are very keen to do this. That is why we thought to get the auditor in and be able to provide a reliable measure that is accepted outside the agency. That is the main ...

Mrs MILLER: Is it easy for you to table that, or do you have other notes amongst that?

Ms MILIKINS: It is a bit mixed up. Is it not enough what I have read into *Hansard*?

Mrs MILLER: No, that will be enough. I will be able to take it out of *Hansard*.

Ms MILIKINS: I will see if I can get you some more ...

Mrs MILLER: In essence, your agency is addressing vehicles as the changeover occurs, and has definitely got your green team competing against each other. I failed miserably in my exercise in Katherine, so I have to do some changes in my house, that is for sure.

Mr KIELY: It is a good story. The agency is pulling together and we understand our responsibilities.

Mrs MILLER: It is good. With your agency you need to set the example; there is no choice.

Mr KIELY: I thank the executive leaders group of the agency for the work they are doing on their fleet vehicles.

Mrs MILLER: That is good. Going to something entirely different. Minister, there has been an aversion and a definite barrier up to having crocodile hunting in the Northern Territory ...

Mr KIELY: Only from the federal government.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, but there has been an objection to it. Will you revive this opportunity? Will you revive the talks with the federal minister?

Mr KIELY: I am afraid that output has been closed off.

Mrs MILLER: Environment and Sustainability?

Mr KIELY: Natural Resource Management Activities.

Mrs MILLER: I consider it is a pretty big environmental issue as well. We could be a bit pedantic about it. It is an opportunity here across several portfolios. One of them, of course, is tourism that I am looking at. As you can guess, I am for it.

Mr KIELY: Yes, for you, Mrs Miller, because ...

Mrs MILLER: Thank you very much, minister.

Mr KIELY: We just have to go back through a few things. Member for Katherine, it was our government which kicked off safari hunting, and then the federal government stomped it - the previous federal government.

Mrs MILLER: He only stopped taking the hides out of the country.

Mr KIELY: In April 2007, the Management Plan for Saltwater Crocodiles in the Northern Territory, which advocates safari hunting, was resubmitted to the then Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts for reconsideration, and duly called for public comment on the resubmitted plan. The outcome of this is yet to be made known. We have gone back to the feds, we have asked them to reconsider it now, and we are waiting to hear what is happening.

Mrs MILLER: Sorry, I did not hear when you said that you did that, minister?

Mr KIELY: April 2007

Mrs MILLER: April 2007. Okay. Now that there has been a change of environment in the federal scene, are you rejigging the federal Environment minister's memory to look at it again?

Mr KIELY: As I said, they have put it out for public comment, and we are waiting.

Mrs MILLER: Obviously the only impediment that is holding it up, to developing sustainable crocodile safari hunting in the Northern Territory, is the federal government, is that right?

Mr KIELY: When it comes to the crocodile as a resource, and its management, we are working very hard with the different crocodile farms around the place. With the federal government, we are looking at what we can do to maximise the opportunities for good economic outcomes and sustainability in the crocodile industry. We are looking at trying to move the industry along, because we see the crocodile farming and the skins from there as more economic opportunities for real jobs in the bush, in getting people on communities involved in it. Good quality skins which the Northern Territory is turning out are going for thousands upon thousands of dollars. When you get in and have a look at these farms, the processes that they use, the health of the animals, the quality of the skins, the humane killing of the animal, and then the product that comes out, we see this as more productive, offering greater opportunity for economic development of this particular resource.

Safari hunting does offer some scope for economic benefit, particularly for people living on communities. We see the farming and how that is handled into the future as offering us even greater scope. So, yes, member for Katherine, while we re-submitted the ask on safari hunting, it has gone out for public consultation and we are waiting for that. We are not sitting idly by as far as looking at opportunities based on crocodile skins and how they are done. We see the opportunity is there. We are going forward in all ways. We are not putting our eggs in the one basket, not just counting on safari shoots as a way of bringing on economic development in the bush.

Mrs MILLER: No, minister, I did not expect that you would. I believe that they both offer great opportunities for the Territory. The reason I have brought this up is that there are already some 600 culled each year. To me, it is a sheer waste that we do not develop that into an industry for those remote communities, not all of them, but those where it is appropriate to set up some economic development in tourism. It is high yield, high pay, high money coming into those communities, because only people who are skilled and can afford the money and know how to humanely kill a croc would be there. It needs to work side by side. There needs to be both crocodile farms as well as the industry being encouraged to develop. I am a great supporter of developing croc safari hunting in the Northern Territory. I believe it is something that we need to look at and develop in our remote communities where it is appropriate and the sooner the better. You do not have an argument with me on that.

Mr KIELY: All right.

Mrs MILLER: I will wait with interest to see what the new federal minister is offering in that area.

For Output 4.1, how many remote communities now operate with solar power only, and where are they? How many will receive solar power during this current budget cycle, and how will that program roll out?

Mr KIELY: Once again, member for Katherine, that is for Power and Water.

Mrs MILLER: Goodness gracious me. I will take up all of Power and Water tomorrow the way I am going.

Mr CHAIRMAN: At least you know you do not have to prepare the questions.

Mrs MILLER: I know! I believe, for Output 4.1, that is all from me, thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you give out grants to community groups each year. Do you have a list of the grants that were given this financial year? If I could have a list of them. Also, what is done to follow up to see what benefits have been achieved?

Mr KIELY: We have all of this that we will be able to table in a moment. You are talking about reporting back, so as to when ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, you just do not give a grant, give them money and then forget about it. You must obviously expect some sort of follow up, and whether the department feels as though it has been valuable and there have been some benefits?

Mr KIELY: Sure, I will ask Lyn Allen to address that.

Ms ALLEN: Member for Braitling, I can table the Environment Grants program of individual project grants. It is a list that I have in front of me for the past year. We do also provide operational grants to a number of organisations. We do not yet have the reports on this particular set of grants; they are due in October. We give people a year to get them done and then a couple of months grace to get them reported back to us. I am very keen, now that this program has been operating for a couple of years, and it is still relatively new, that we do have a follow up mechanism, so we get a report from everybody. What I am very keen to do is to take the next step, and to really start to look at what have achieved in that program overall, and to see what we have learned from what has worked in various communities. Some of it is going to be horses for courses and only work for those communities; some of it is going to be lessons more generally known.

What we do know is that, each year, a number of our grant recipients are nominated for things like the Power and Water Melaleuca Awards. Of the awards issued last night, we were associated with funding of at least three winners, so that was very gratifying. That, again, brought to my staff's attention that there is a good news story to be told after the event, as well as processing the grants and making sure that people have them done.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you believe that one-off grants for one year is the way to go, or would we see more benefits if you made them three or five year grants?

Mr KIELY: The grants are granted for particular reasons. If it is an ongoing program they move on from the grants situation to a program. So, the grants are a stimulus, I would say.

Mrs BRAHAM: I believe the sustainability of some of these projects that people take on, doing it one-off, and then next year they come along and say: 'Look, we do not have the money.' And they have to apply again, and it takes a lot of time and often they do not have the expertise. Have you considered giving them in a block of three or five years?

Mr KIELY: We certainly do have ongoing grants. Do you want to know what they are? The triennial agreements?

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you want to table them?

Mr KIELY: I can ...

Mrs BRAHAM: You can tell us a little.

Mr KIELY: The Arid Lands Environment Centre, Australian Marine Conservation Society, Environment Centre of the Northern Territory, Environmental Defenders Office and Keep Australia Beautiful get continuous funding.

Mrs BRAHAM: Last year, you gave a grant to the Alice Springs Town Council for a recycling can trial. The amount was \$10 000. It was hugely successful. In fact, the council also contributed a lot. Minister, are you in favour of container deposit legislation? If you are, when are you going to introduce it?

Mr KIELY: It goes back a long way, member for Braitling. This is perhaps one of the first questions put to me by you when I was in this role, and I said yes, I am in favour of CDL taken as a national focus. I gave an undertaking to you that, at the earliest opportunity, I would take it up with the new federal Environment minister. When I was in Canberra at a meeting, I specifically laid that issue on the table and it got up in the ministerial council a bit later on, where all states came to the party and a working group was formed out of the ministerial council of Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania to have a look at it. So, yes, we are in favour of CDL, but it must be taken in the whole of Australia context so that we get it right. That has always been our position; that has not changed. We are on the record, we are there. The report comes down in October or November.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you want to win that next election, minister? Announce it. There are people out there who would be so much in favour of it. The litter of drink containers really is an eyesore and pollutes the environment. Let us face it, that small trial you funded for the Alice Springs Town Council proved that people were willing to get off their butts, pick it up and take it to get their 5¢ back.

Mr KIELY: We are there, member for Braitling, we have said we support CDL. Our position has always been well known to the public. Last federal election, I believe the CLP incumbent made a promise that they would bring in a trial of CDL, it never happened. Going to this election, the CLP has said they would bring it in. But, member for Braitling, we are there.

Mrs BRAHAM: I introduced legislation, and both government and opposition knocked it back. So, if you are really there ...

Mr KIELY: We have it there in the ministerial council. We have all of Australian looking at it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, today, South Australia announced that they are looking at a total ban on plastic bags. It is interesting, I went downtown to a book shop and I said, no, I do not want a plastic bag, so they immediately pulled out a re-usable bag. Where do you stand on plastic bags? They are an environmental hazard in the Territory. Would you support a levy, or would you support banning them?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Clarification – are you asking for the minister's personal view, the department's view, or government's view?

Mrs BRAHAM: Any! All three.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The personal view would be ruled out of order, I would have thought.

Mrs BRAHAM: When I say 'you', I am saying 'minister', okay?

Mr KIELY: There is no dispute that they are a litter problem.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you support South Australia in the steps they have taken to ban plastic bags?

Mr KIELY: Once again, at that ministerial council, this item was on the table and my ministerial colleagues across Australia have considered various approaches to it. It is a complex issue. All jurisdictions agree on a phase out of it, on the method that we are going to give to it. It is important – and you are alluding to it now – that if you just bring in a ban there will be a nett cost. You are saying to bring in a tax on plastic bags. We are exploring this at a federal, at a whole-of-nation approach to it, to get the right balance. This is coming back in October or November, and we will have a look at what the best outcome is then. That is where it is with us.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, those sorts of steps really show a commitment to look at sustainable environments. When you get rid of the rubbish, the drink containers, and you get rid of the plastic bags, as the member for Katherine has been saying, that helps towards climate change.

Can I ask you this one, which is not really to do with that, regarding water tanks? You give a subsidy for a bit of the plumbing, I believe. Is that it? Do you agree with water tanks in remote communities? You are now to embark upon a huge project building numerous houses in the bush. Would you support, with each house, that water tanks be supplied?

Mr KIELY: My personal view is one thing, which at this estimates hearing, we are not to go through. That is actually a housing issue and should be appropriately addressed to the Housing Minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could we ask one of your officers?

Mr KIELY: No, you are asking me.

Mrs BRAHAM: These are good ideas that you should be supporting. That is something you could take on and say to the Housing Minister, 'we think it is a good idea'.

Mr KIELY: Member for Brainting, at the Melaleuca Awards last night, we looked at a chap who was involved in recycling. He is doing a great, wondrous job. Look at the amount of food that people waste in their fridge and it gets thrown out. It gets down to sustainability, and we all have a role to play as individuals, really.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, what have you done to really make a difference in the environment from a point of view of environmental care and sustainability? Just give us a few.

Mr KIELY: What the agency has done?

The Northern Territory government released the NT Strategy for Greenhouse Action in 2006, covering the period 2006 to 2008. The strategy is aimed at minimising emissions across all sectors of the economy and taking steps towards the prevention of unavoidable climate change. In November 2007, the Chief Minister announced the creation of a new portfolio of Climate Change, under his responsibility and, in February 2008, announced that a new Climate Change Policy for the Northern Territory would be developed by 2009. In fact, it is open for public comment at the moment. The new approach included changes to administrative arrangements with the shift in responsibility for a whole-of-government policy; coordination from NRETA to the new Climate Change Policy; and coordination in the Department of the Chief Minister.

The development of new Climate Change Policy was assisted by John Stanford, of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu; first off in consultation and discussion paper. That was released by the Chief Minister on 5 June. The paper has been informed by discussion with focus groups, as well as the stakeholders, and across departmental working groups on which NRETA was represented. NRETA remains heavily engaged in climate change matters through contributing through its in-house expertise and corporate knowledge to the new NT Climate Change Policy development process and other relevant national policy processes, in a range of areas, including fire and vegetation management. NRETA staff are providing input to national policy discussions. It is part of the COAG working group on Climate Change and its various subgroups. These cover areas including: the National Emissions Trading Scheme; complementary measures to the emissions trading scheme; adaptation to unavoidable climate change; renewable energy; energy efficiency; developing a research agenda for climate change impacts; and adaptation to the tropical north Australian partnership with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions; liaison with the Garnaut Review Secretariat, especially providing input to issues pertinent to northern Australia and the Territory, such as strategic bio-management to reduce emissions.

The Northern Territory Budget 2008-09 provides \$11m over three years to tackle climate change, including \$5m for a package of incentives to encourage business and households to reduce their energy use, which are now included in the budget for 2008. There is \$6m to improve government's own carbon footprint, with upgrades to facilities such as schools and health clinics. NRETA will work with the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development, and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Department of the Chief Minister and other relevant agencies to implement these programs.

The government continues to support community incentives through its support for the COOLMob program and EnvironmeNT. You have also heard of the work that we are doing in this agency ourselves. We are really doing quite a lot to tackle greenhouse, and we will continue to do quite a lot.

Mrs BRAHAM: Will you be giving your report to parliament on what you have achieved?

Mr KIELY: That is what we are doing now.

Mrs BRAHAM: Much of it is really nice words, but I would like to see some detail. I would like to see some positive results coming out of some of those policies and things that you have talked about.

Mr KIELY: Give it time, member for Braiting. We have the Chief Minister starting up a Climate Change portfolio, and we see a lot of work that has gone into that Climate Change paper which is setting the pathway for the future. There is a lot going on. The results will be there. It has gone out for public consultation now, on that particular paper. I believe today they are in Alice Springs. You can put a submission in; Mr Chairman, you can put a submission in; anyone in the public can. I would like to see something from the Country Liberal Party. They are more than welcome, and we look forward to that.

Mr CONLAN: If you buy a Prius, you buy a hybrid car and we will put a submission in.

Mr KIELY: We look forward to your contribution. You sit there and ask: 'What are you doing?' We have a greenhouse paper; we have it out there for public consultation and ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, reducing emissions by 1%.

Mr KIELY: I call on you ...

Mr CONLAN: Reducing it by 1%.

Mr KIELY: I call on you, member for Greatorex, and your team, to put a submission in. If you are thinking about greenhouse gases, here is your chance ...

Mr CONLAN: If you are thinking about it, you might get yourself a hybrid car, minister.

Mr KIELY: Well, put it in there.

Mr CONLAN: You use a 4-WD to get all the way from Sanderson, all the way across town.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Order, order!

Mrs BRAHAM: I have a water tank, I have solar hot water, I have timers on my lights, I have a drip system. Those sorts of things should be actively encouraged across the Territory, no matter where you are.

Mr KIELY: And we have \$5m over three years on programs that tackle household energy saving.

Mrs BRAHAM: Lajamanu had a really good recycling program that you helped fund, but you do not maintain them. That is my frustration. When you get good programs like that and they are working well, like Julalikari had the can crusher, let us do it. Let us not make them one-off grants. Let us have a program where they are ongoing so we really see a big difference. That is what I am after. We cannot have CDL, plastic bags, and water tanks; let us at least make the grants we do have ongoing so that those programs that are really effective are maintained. Too many groups continually say they have to put in an application again, it takes time, they might get it and they might not. The whole system of grants is really frustrating for people out there.

Mr KIELY: Be advised that we will be working with the shires to do those things. So your views are pretty well ours as well. It is about sustainability. We are not at odds on this; we are working together.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could I have that paper tabled, please? Minister, that is all for that one. I think you got my message, or I hope you have.

Mr KIELY: We share your message.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There are no further questions? That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Katherine, do you have any questions?

Answers to Question on Notice Nos 8.1, 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4

Mr KIELY: I had some questions on notice that I can respond to, if I may?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that is all right.

Mr KIELY: No 8.1, tabled; No 8.2 tabled; No 8.3 tabled; and No 8.4 tabled. Thank you, member for Katherine.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – HERITAGE CONSERVATION
Output 5.1 – Heritage and Conservation Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0, Heritage Conservation, Output 5.1, Heritage and Conservation Services.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Heritage and Conservation Services - how many sites are listed as Heritage in the Northern Territory?

Mr KIELY: Bear with us; we are going through the books at the moment. Would you mind if we took that on notice, member for Katherine? We just do not have that information before us.

Mrs MILLER: That is fine.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question please, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: How many Heritage sites are there in the Northern Territory; and are you able to name them?

Mr KIELY: They are on the website.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I know. I was wondering if you knew them. That is what I was just checking.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you still want that question on notice, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: How many are there?

Mr KIELY: I do not think I will take it on notice. They are in the public domain.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, minister.

Mrs MILLER: So you will not take it on notice?

Mr KIELY: They are on the web.

Mr CONLAN: But he does not know. That is the point.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, Heritage and Conservation Services - I am presuming this is to do with anything to do with heritage, is that right?

Mr KIELY: Ask the question.

Mrs MILLER: Guess what I am going to talk about?

Mr KIELY: I think I have it.

Mrs MILLER: How could you guess?

Mr KIELY: \$2.7m?

Mrs MILLER: I am going to talk to you about the Katherine Heritage Railway Bridge. The reason I am going to talk to you about this is because it is a very significant structure, number one. Number two, it is structurally sound, although it needs a bit of work done to it. When I got your quote, after a long drawn out period of time, of over \$2m, is that the only quote you got? Over \$2m?

Mr KIELY: \$2.7m.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, nearly \$3m. Is that the only quote that you got? Are you going to get quotes from other companies? I know that it is a specialised service and that it is difficult to get that specialised service, but there must be more than one in Australia?

Mr KIELY: It certainly is a significant sum to be asked to remove the lead paint. We were surprised by it as well, just as surprised as you. It was DPI which organised the quotes, not NRETA.

Mrs MILLER: So where do we go from here? I am not just sitting back and saying: 'Oh gosh, that is terrible'?

Mr KIELY: You could ask the minister for DPI.

Mrs MILLER: So it is a heritage bridge?

Mr KIELY: Heritage Listed.

Mrs MILLER: That is right, it is Heritage Listed. One of the things I was told at a briefing was that it would be difficult to allocate money to it, to the repairs and maintenance of it, if it is not in use. If it was to be used, it would be more likely to attract funding. Well, I had a use for it. I did have a use for it, and some people from Heritage may not agree with it, but it is a use and it would be used. So, where does the heritage conservation fit under that? The scenario is, if we do not spend money on this significant heritage item, it is going to slowly deteriorate until it is just not there. So what do we do? What is government prepared to do?

Mr KIELY: I will ask Ms Allen to talk to the issue of an item that is Heritage Listed, and uses that it can be put to, or how usage can occur.

Ms ALLEN: Member for Katherine, the discussion we had was around how it was better, if you like, for heritage if it was in use, because then there was somebody who had an interest in keeping it going and it was not necessarily then dependent on government to step in to look after its heritage values. We have a number of heritage programs, both for government-owned heritage properties for repairs and maintenance, and also a grants program for privately-owned heritage properties which assist people to do that. The difficulty facing all of us is that the Katherine River Bridge issue is much larger than any annual allocation, the equivalent nearly of three annual allocations for the government-owned heritage R&M program. It would be fabulous if there was a feasible use for the Katherine River Railway Bridge, then the maintenance issues could then be shared. My understanding was that there was to be some follow up to your suggestions at that meeting, but they were being done by a separate department to us.

Mrs MILLER: That is right. Through the Chair, I have followed up with some of those meetings. Of course, like anything that you suggest, there is a group of people who say it is a terrible idea, it should just remain heritage; and there is a group that says what a damn good idea, let us use it. I look at your funding and look at what you have. I would take all of that, and more, and there would be nothing else getting money spent on heritage. There is little likelihood, is there, of receiving any funding through Heritage Conservation?

Mr KIELY: We are exploring options, member for Katherine. Never say no. We are exploring options.

Mrs MILLER: There is an election coming up. Do not tell me it will be on the front page of the *Katherine Times* again to be painted. This will be the third time now, third election, that it is going to be painted. My aim is to get the thing looking good and to conserve it. The whole foyer in my office is dedicated to that railway bridge, including the photos that were taken when it was originally built. I have a lot of admiration for that bridge. It will be a crying shame if the Northern Territory government, whatever colour it is, does not place significant heritage on that railway bridge. Minister, am I going to be seen in your shell-like ear for some time, is that right?

Mr KIELY: In this life and in the next, I dare say, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Unfortunately, I fear that you are right. I shall be speaking to DPI as well. I have spent all the Heritage Conservation money. I do not have any other questions in that area.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you recently called for submissions for grants for Heritage. Have they been decided yet?

Mr KIELY: No, they have not been decided yet.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Pitchi Ritchi in Alice Springs: could you tell me its status at the moment? I know there was concern because of the legality of the will.

Mr KIELY: At the moment, the council has changed its mind after calling for public submissions. The council has sought comment now and it is due to review these comments at its meeting on 27 June. If it considers it should be Heritage Listed, it will provide its recommendation to me for consideration. So it has gone back to public consultation. It has not gone through the ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Is it Heritage Listed?

Mr KIELY: We do not have the recommendation. We do not have anything yet. It is still under consideration.

Mrs BRAHAM: When is that likely to happen, do you think?

Mr KIELY: 27 June 2008.

Mrs BRAHAM: Can you outline the process?

Mr KIELY: Yes, I will ask Ms Allen to outline the process.

Ms ALLEN: The process under the Heritage legislation is: something is nominated; it goes to the Heritage Advisory Council, which then decides whether it should be accepted as a nomination or not. If they accept it as a nomination, they put it out for public review. They then take those public comments into consideration when they look at the assessment and make a recommendation to the minister. The minister then decides whether something is Heritage Listed or not. In this case, we are up to the stage whether HAC needs to look at the public comments, the owners' comments and the assessment, and then make a recommendation to the minister. In my experience, after a council meeting, it takes up to six weeks for the Chair of the Heritage Advisory Council to make the recommendation and for that to get to the minister, and for him to make decisions and for gazettals to happen and those sorts of things.

Mrs BRAHAM: So you are not going to give us a hint about what is going to happen?

Ms ALLEN: I cannot tell you because HAC has not met and I have not seen the public comments.

Mrs BRAHAM: It is an important area. I do not know if you have been there, minister, but it would be good.

Mr KIELY: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: I am glad to hear that you have. I want to say thank you to whoever it was – the Old Residency is one of your listed buildings. Recently, we had cause to call on assistance to get trespassers out of there who were camping in the back area. It seems to me there needs to be some work done so that people cannot easily access the Residency grounds. Who should I be talking to about that? I believe it is worthwhile that we put a barrier up so that people cannot really go in there and camp at night and drink and whatever.

Mr KIELY: Perhaps we can follow it up out of session, if you like?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, that would be good. This is a member for Nelson one: is the government considering heritage parks run by Parks and Wildlife to protect and develop World War II sites? I guess we are talking about the airstrip. What he is asking is: is government is considering heritage parks run by Parks and Wildlife?

Mr KIELY: I am not sure I fully understand the heritage park notion that you are putting forward, but I can tell you, if you look at Hughes Airfield, that was recommended in 1997 for heritage listing. The CLP never listed that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Have you listed it?

Mr KIELY: We have sent it back for reconsideration by HAC.

Mrs BRAHAM: What the member for Nelson is saying is, if it is listed as a heritage park, will it be maintained by Parks and Wildlife? I think that is what he is saying.

Mr KIELY: Are you talking along the lines of Arltunga, perhaps? If we can go over the management of Arltunga, which is a heritage area, rather than - it is managed by Parks and Wildlife.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, Arltunga is a heritage area.

Mr KIELY: We might get Mr Phelps to go over how that is managed. Perhaps that is what he is talking about.

Mr PHELPS: We do have a number of our parks and reserves declared, particularly for their heritage values, and Arltunga, which you would be familiar with, is one of those. Of course, the heritage values at the Alice Springs Telegraph Station are a key part of why that park is managed. In reference to the question regarding the World War II sites, of course, both Charles Darwin and Casuarina Coastal Reserve have World War II sites within them that are managed and protected as part of our park management process.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have a list on the web of the heritage parks, or the areas that are run by Parks and Wildlife?

Mr PHELPS: Some of the parks, by nature of their name, indicate that they are heritage parks and they are actually called historic reserves, rather than nature reserves or conservation reserves. For other parks, such as Charles Darwin, where the heritage is part of the reason for the declaration, information about those key heritage elements is on the website and in the fact sheet for that particular park.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, could I leave this question with you so that the member for Nelson could get back to someone to explain exactly what he was talking about, which World War II sites he had in mind? I am not sure which ones he would have, except the two that Mr Phelps mentioned.

Mr KIELY: I received a letter from the member for Nelson representing – I do not think it was a constituent actually - some quarters of the RAAF Base which had some sort of World War II significance or something or other, but that was a federal matter.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, thank you for that. I will get him to come back to you if necessary to clarify it. That is all at the moment.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. That concludes consideration of Output Group 5.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 6.0 – SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL COLLECTIONS

Output 6.3 - Herbarium

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 6.0, Scientific and Cultural Collections. I note from the schedule that Output 6.1 and 6.2 were addressed by the Minister for Arts and Museums on Wednesday. I think that is all there is.

Mr KIELY: Except the Herbarium. No questions for the Herbarium?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 6.3, the Herbarium, I beg your pardon. The committee will now proceed to consider Output 6.3, the Herbarium.

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I do not have any questions.

Mrs MILLER: I would only have one. Minister, I have an interesting one for you: in the Herbarium, is there any marijuana grown there? It is a research area, is it not?

Mr KIELY: I have heard it referred to as an herb! I will hand over to Mr Dixon.

Mr DIXON: Member for Katherine, I would to point out that the Herbarium is a collection of dried plant specimens used for research. Indeed, we do have collections of marijuana, *cannabis sativa*, which we use for training exercises with the department of Police and Emergency Services. In the past I have run personal training workshops for police on how they can go about identifying marijuana when they are in their field of operations.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, that is actually the reason why I asked, even though it was lighthearted, you thought. Thank you very much.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay. If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output Group 6.0. I note from the Schedule, minister, that Output Group 7.0 was also addressed by the Minister for Arts and Museums on Wednesday 18 June.

OUTPUT GROUP 8.0 – ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY Output 8.1 - Environment Protection Authority

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output Group 8.0. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, the EPA, as you know, raised a lot of discussion, and lengthy discussion, before the EPA model was finally put in place by this Territory government. Since the EPA has been in place, how many projects have they reported on and how many have they blocked?

Mr KIELY: For the purposes of *Hansard*, we have been joined by the Acting Executive Director of the EPA, Miss Juanita Croft; and the question was, how many?

Mrs MILLER: How many projects has the EPA reported on since its establishment, and how many has it blocked?

Mr KIELY: Blocked?

Mrs MILLER: How many, where the information they provided to government has prevented the project from going ahead?

Mr KIELY: Ms Croft.

Ms CROFT: Juanita Croft, Acting Executive Director of the Environment Protection Authority Secretariat. Your question was: how many projects have been reported on? They were established in March of this year, and they have been established as a body that reports on environmental policy or legislative frameworks. They are not a body that has been established to report on specific projects, so they have not reported on any projects at this stage.

Mrs MILLER: Frameworks and legislative ...

Ms CROFT: Legislative frameworks and environmental policy.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, I will need to go back and look at all my information. That actually looks like - and it is no reflection on you at all - that looks like you have breached your promise to Territorians. Does it have any teeth? Does the EPA have any teeth?

Mr KIELY: Teeth? The EPA has been given all the powers it needs to do the job to begin with. The powers are broad and far reaching. We have existing environmental processes that address particular development proposals. We do not need to replicate them, member for Katherine. What the EPA will do is help to ensure those processes function effectively and efficiently. So, yes, it does have teeth.

Mrs MILLER: I will refer again to the EPA. It was reported in the *Northern Territory News* on 11 June that the EPA Chairman, Andrew Tupper, when asked about the proposed INPEX development in Darwin Harbour, said: 'It is not the role of the EPA to get involved in individual projects'. Well, if the EPA has no

power to investigate the environmental suitability of a major project such as INPEX, do you not think that that is a breach of promise to Territorians about the independence of the EPA?

Mr KIELY: I have not spoken to the chair about that article. I will go on the *Northern Territory News* because it is a good, reputable paper and ...

Mrs MILLER: Do not believe everything that is there.

Mr KIELY: The legislation is clear, member for Katherine. The government cannot direct the EPA on how it goes about its job.

Mrs MILLER: But a project as important to our environment as INPEX would be, why cannot the EPA report on that?

Mr KIELY: The EPA is independent. You cannot direct it to do anything.

Mrs MILLER: What do you want them to do then? They cannot report on a development. They cannot report to government on a development as big as that, that is going to happen in Darwin Harbour. What is their role? To me, they have absolutely no teeth at all. That actually breaks your government's promise to Territorians.

Mr KIELY: We will go over their role again, because I do not think you caught it the first time. I defer to Ms Croft.

Ms CROFT: The Environment Protection Authority has been established as a body that would look at the bigger picture. It would look at existing legislation, policies and processes to see if they are able to deliver ecologically sustainable development for the Northern Territory. That is why it has been established. It has not been established to replicate what other parts of government are already doing. It has not been established to replicate the environmental assessment element of what government is already doing. The EPA has established criteria of how it will determine what work it will take on. That criteria states that it will not involve itself on specific projects unless requested to.

Mrs MILLER: The name, Environmental Protection Authority, gives a connotation to Territorians that they are being totally protected; their environment is being totally protected from anything doing any damage to our environment. That is the connotation that Territorians have. So you are not able to report on or research what INPEX plans to do in the harbour? You are saying that is not your role, it is not EPA's role, minister?

Mr KIELY: The EPA's role - I believe we have gone over this before; it is clear it is independent.

Mrs MILLER: No. I am asking, why cannot they report on a project as big as INPEX? Who is going to do the Environmental Impact Statement on that?

Mr KIELY: We are dealing with the EPA in its role ...

Mrs MILLER: Yes, but who is going to do it?

Mr KIELY: I am not going to get into individual ...

Mrs MILLER: It is not individual. Who is doing the Environmental Impact Statement on INPEX? Who is doing it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, minister, I am not sure if you got to answer. If you did not, I will allow you to. However, this session has now reached 6 pm, which is the time for it to conclude. If you want to answer, and feel that you have not answered that question, then you may.

Mr KIELY: No, I have been one to follow process all the way through this.

Mrs MILLER: I bet you have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, thank you for your time, and for all your officials.

Mrs MILLER: Oh, saved.

Mr KIELY: If I might just hold you there because you did have some questions on notice that we can get back to you. We will table these. We have question on notice No 8.8, and question on notice No 8.7. Unfortunately, we are walking away with three questions which will not be ready today.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you very much, minister, and everyone who has appeared here this afternoon. Thank you for your time. It is much appreciated by the committee.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER BONSON'S PORTFOLIOS

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good evening, minister. I note from the schedule that you will take questions on Output Group 4.0, Sport and Recreation, which sits within the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. If you would like to introduce the officials you have with you tonight and, if you wish, make an opening statement on behalf of Sport and Recreation.

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND SPORT

Mr BONSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am responsible for the Sport and Recreation output group, with the exception of Water Safety and Animal Welfare, which my colleague, the Minister for Local Government, is responsible for. I will be joined this evening by Dr David Ritchie, Chief Executive Officer of my Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport; Mr Steve Rossingh, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation; and Mr Dwayne McInnes, Chief Financial Officer with the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport.

The Sport and Recreation portfolio continues to deliver opportunities for Territorians to participate in sport and recreation activities at all levels, as well as developing, constructing and maintaining sporting facilities in the Territory for all Territorians. The 2008-09 Budget provides \$25.8m for Sport and Recreation across the Territory.

A total of \$8.77m has been made available to the Sport and Recreation grants pool in Budget 2008-09. Included in this increased grant allocation is new funding of \$1m a year for both 2008-09 and 2009-10 financial years; which will be made available in Sport and Recreation grants pools through sporting development grants. This pool is for grants to the governing bodies of sport and recreation groups, besides local governing bodies, as well as grassroots organisations to increase their capacity to provide regular sport and recreation activity.

As part of the Territory government's *Closing the Gap* initiative, \$4.5m has been allocated to supporting sport and recreation programs until 2011-12. This funding will provide additional support to remote indigenous communities. Funding for 52 indigenous sports officers and communities across the Territory is currently provided; and the increase of an additional \$0.5m in 2008-09 *Closing the Gap* money will see this number increase.

Some \$3.3m has been allocated in 2008-09 for the Northern Territory Institute of Sport (NTIS), which is a key partner in the sport and recreation sector, through its identification, development and support of the Territory's talent and elite athletes. The NTIS supports more than 150 Territory athletes each year. The NTIS provides this support through squad scholarships for 10 sport programs. These are: Australian Rules football, cricket, cycling, hockey, netball, Rugby League, Rugby Union, tennis, tenpin bowling and weightlifting. Additionally, individual scholarships are also provided to athletes whose sport is not one of these 10 squads.

The Northern Territory government is committed to the continued support of the community level sports, elite sport and major sporting fixtures. We recognise the importance of providing funding to sport infrastructure development for sport and recreation activities in remote communities; and continued support to our elite athletes, providing them with the opportunities and pathways to progress to the next level of their sport and represent the Northern Territory at the national and international level. The successful delivery of quality of sport and recreation in the Northern Territory is no easy achievement. I pay tribute to my agency for the way they go about the task. I also thank the officers who have made themselves available this evening to assist in answering the committee's questions. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions relating solely to the statement?

Mr MILLS: No, not from me.

Mrs BRAHAM: I guess we can go through questions.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - SPORT AND RECREATION Output 4.1 - Sports Development

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008 as they relate to the output group for Sport and Recreation which sits within the

Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. I now call for questions relating to Output Group 4.0, Sport and Recreation, Output 4.1, Sports Development. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, good evening. Good evening, everyone. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, swimming and cycling are in the top four sport and recreation activities nationally. Why, then, after promising a pool at Humpty Doo, have you not even managed to turn one bit of soil in creating a pool there?

Mr BONSON: That is an interesting question, member for Greatorex. As you would know, as a born and bred Territorian, I have a passion for sport; and many of the committee members have a long history, as well, in sports throughout the Northern Territory, and their families and their families' parents.

In regard to that matter, I can assure you that the Northern Territory government takes all sports facilities very seriously. However, in regard to that particular question, I am not sure, Dr Ritchie, if that is relevant to this portfolio?

Dr RITCHIE: This output is the Sports Development output, so if it did, it would be in another output further down. The pool at Humpty Doo is not part of our program.

Mr CONLAN: Can I, with respect, Mr Chairman, as I say, for sports and recreation, the ABS says that swimming and cycling are very much part of recreation across the Northern Territory. To encourage people to engage in swimming in the Northern Territory, you need to create swimming pools. This government has promised a swimming pool, yet, you have not even turned one bit of soil to build one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have been given the answer that the building of a pool is not within this portfolio. In terms of the recreation aspect, I am not arguing that swimming or cycling are not sports. We are looking at the Sports Development, as opposed to recreation development. What I am saying, in terms of future questions, is if we are talking about development of the sport of swimming, yes, that will come into this, I would have thought. But, in terms of recreation ...

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, with respect, it is the same portfolio as the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It might be the same portfolio, but it is not the same output.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, can you guide me as to where I might be able to ask this rather important question? Would it come under facilities and fixtures, perhaps?

Mr BONSON: Mr Chairman, in the hand of friendship, we can provide some information in regard to this issue. I am sure we will clarify the fact that this is more likely a local government issue which should be appropriately asked there. I will ask Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: There is some history to this, and Mr Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport and Recreation, can give you some background on this.

Mr ROSSINGH: Steve Rossingh, Executive Director of Sport and Recreation. My understanding is that \$1m was offered to the Litchfield Shire a number of years ago, basically as a seed towards the pool out there. The additional funds were not able to be found at that point in time, and also there were some issues about the ongoing maintenance of the pool. On that basis, Litchfield Shire rejected the initial offer of \$1m. I believe there has been a lot of work in the meantime to try to re-establish a pool of funding for that pool, and those things are being discussed at the moment. Historically, swimming pools come under the auspices of local government.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Rossingh. Minister and Mr Chairman, we talk about sports development as opposed to facilities. We are talking about development of sport - the individual to develop themselves into sport. Is that right?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That would certainly be my understanding, but I do not claim to be the expert on the output for that. We can ask the clarification, through the minister or your CEO, if you would like to answer that. I accept that output groups become somewhat artificial sometimes.

Mr BONSON: All I can tell you, as a person who enjoys sport and recreation - loves it, has a passion for it, been involved in it all my life ...

Ms CARNEY: Could you speak up?

Mr BONSON: Sorry, committee members. ... swimming is an important sport, and so is cycling. The Northern Territory government supports all our sports and recreation groups. However, it has been made quite clear by both Dr Ritchie and Mr Rossingh. Fundamentally, I understand the argument you are putting, member for Greatorex, as opposed to being too confrontational, this is not a relevant point to this output ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, we were just seeking some clarification as to what your agency interpreted the Output 4.1 to be including, just to give members some guidance as to where the question ...

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: This output primarily is the bit of the program which funds sporting bodies. There are a number of grants to peak bodies, there are a number of smaller grants, and it includes a range of periodic grants and one-off grants to assist in development of sport and recreation across the Territory. It is those sorts of things. The next output is the one where we have the facilities.

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is the money grants?

Dr RITCHIE: This is the money grants bit.

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask then, minister, how do you develop sport without a facility? How do you develop that sport without the facility?

Mr BONSON: With all due respect, member for Greatorex, it has been clarified that that question might be more appropriate under the Facilities and Fixtures output. This particular output is more to do with the programs that we do. I am not sure that I can add any more to that, except if Dr Ritchie has any more to add.

Dr RITCHIE: The priorities of the program are based on community needs. At the moment, cycling is not the subject of a major grant. It is not that it could not be ...

Mr BONSON: Swimming pool.

Dr RITCHIE: No, the swimming pool would be a capital grant, not an operational one.

Mr BONSON: Just to clarify, I think the member for Greatorex asked a question about both swimming and cycling. I believe we have clarified the swimming section. In terms of cycling, member for Greatorex, I just wonder – did you not tie both swimming and cycling together?

Mr CONLAN: My original question was that the ABS identified swimming and cycling in the top four sports nationally, yes.

Mr BONSON: The swimming pool question, I believe, was dealt with. Did you have an issue with cycling?

Mr CONLAN: I will move on to that, thank you, minister. In Sport and Recreation, how can we seriously discuss sport and recreation without a recreation output? There is not an actual recreation output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There is a non-budget specific line for questions. Did I hear correctly, Dr Ritchie, that the recreation development was part of sports development under this heading?

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, it is, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was my misinterpretation I gave you before, member for Greatorex. The grants that they are talking about are recreation as well as sports.

Mr BONSON: Just to clarify that, it is sport and recreation, and the NT government places great value on both sport and recreation. We all know - everyone in this room knows - the importance of sport and recreation to the fabric of our general communities. Anyone who has grown up in the Territory would understand how important sport and recreation is in Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy, Darwin, etcetera, to that fabric.

Mr CONLAN: Well, it is. I am sure it is very important to the people of Humpty Doo. Swimming is a peak body. How can they swim with out a pool, minister?

Mr CHAIRMAN: With respect, member for Greatorex, we have already covered the ground of the issue of the pool. It not being built is not within this portfolio and is not within this output group. It is not about a grant of money. It was explained previously about the history of it, and it was clearly placed within the Department of Local Government rather than Sport and Recreation. I can understand your frustration, but that is the answer that has been given on that.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, Mr Chairman. Can we move to the second question? We might end up covering some of the same ground. As I said, cycling was also in the top four sports nationally. In the last 12 months, how many kilometres of bicycle paths have you added throughout the Northern Territory? Could you answer that question?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: From time to time, cycling is not excluded in this program. We are currently talking with Darwin City Council about doing some upgrades on the velodrome which they own. Similarly, from time to time - not in this year's budget - the Department of Planning and Infrastructure is involved in planning cycle paths and other infrastructure. So, it is included, broadly speaking, in this output as well.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Can I direct that question to the minister: how many kilometres of bicycle paths have you added throughout the Northern Territory? I believe you said that it was appropriate to ask this.

Dr RITCHIE: With respect, the bicycle paths are part of the infrastructure that is managed by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, and it is not ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, we ...

Dr RITCHIE: We do not get the funding and we are not involved.

Mr CONLAN: Dr Ritchie, with the greatest respect, cycling is an Olympic sport. The last time I looked, it was actually a sport and, therefore, it would come under the portfolio of the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Infrastructure as well, but cycling is also a sport, minister.

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I think Dr Ritchie has made it quite clear that management of that particular program is not within this output. The reality here ...

Ms CARNEY: We will just tell the people that the Sports minister is not ...

Mr CONLAN: He is not interested in cycling. Minister, why do you not just answer the question, anyway?

Mr CHAIRMAN: A point of order. You have been told, not by the minister, but by the CEO of the department, why the bicycle cycle paths are not within this output. To lay an accusation at the minister is both ill-directed and unnecessary.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, what accusation are you talking about?

Mr CHAIRMAN: About being disinterested in sport. You said it.

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, I was saying that to my colleague beside me. If Hansard picked up, I withdraw that. I withdraw any accusation, Mr Chairman, to the minister for Sport.

Ms CARNEY: He is not just interested in cycling apparently, Mr Chairman. I think that was the point my colleague was trying to make.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Araluen, you cannot make that inference from the fact that you are asking questions which are not within this output group.

Mr BONSON: Just to clarify that, Mr Chairman. I believe it has been made quite clear that cycling paths are different to the sport of cycling. I can talk about the sport of cycling in terms of what support we

give them. In terms of cycle paths, I do not know how I and Dr Ritchie can make it any clearer, but it is not involved in this output group. Dr Ritchie, do you have anything else to add to that?

Mr CONLAN: Through the Chair, minister, could you please tell this committee what you have done to develop the sport of cycling in the Northern Territory?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I would enjoy doing that. Dr Ritchie.

Mr CONLAN: Dr Ritchie will enjoy doing that. Thank you, Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Member for Greatorex, in this output, there is nothing that is directly relating to cycling. However, in the output that comes a bit further down, the Institute of Sport, you will find, at an elite level, that we have paid for a coach and training of our elite squads. It is handled at that level.

Mr CONLAN: So, in Output 4.1, under Sports Development, there is nothing towards cycling, one of the top four sports nationally, by the Northern Territory government?

Mr BONSON: It is my understanding that, under this output, we provide the Northern Territory Cycling Association with support of \$18 663. We also provide support under another output - I am not sure which.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If we can just stick with this output, perhaps, if you are happy with that.

Mr BONSON: Certainly, Mr Chairman. To clarify that, I do not have a particular dislike or a particular sport that I love more than the others. I love them all. The principles of sport and recreation are fundamental to our society, and anyone who wants to criticise the Northern Territory government's support of sport and recreation is basically un-Australian.

Mr CONLON: Can I ask you what about recreational cycling, minister? Sport and recreation – it is a little tricky, because there is no a specific output, but it was explained that they both come under this particular output. What has the Northern Territory government done to invest in recreational cycling, minister?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: As we have said, there is a grant of money to the peak body and the degree that is then used by them to support cycling at various levels is up to them. We then have the elite program through the Institute of Sport.

Mr CONLON: Do you have an amount? Are you able to provide an amount of money?

Dr RITCHIE: That was the \$18 000. That was the grant to the peak body and they can spend that as they see fit for cycling.

Mr CONLON: With respect again, Dr Ritchie, through the Chair, minister, \$18 633 is not going to go a long way to developing cycling paths for recreational cyclists in the Territory.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Greatorex. I welcome your interest in cycling in the Northern Territory. I too, have an interest in cycling. The reality is there is a process with the grants, and through Dr Ritchie, it is appropriate to discuss that program.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, could you turn around and talk up a bit louder, please. It is very hard to hear you.

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, I was just about to ask Dr Ritchie to answer the process for the peak body.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do not forget the velodrome in Alice Springs and the great cycling race we have just had. You have not mentioned those. We are just trying to get some information.

Dr RITCHIE: The question, as I heard it, is what are we doing about cycle paths? As I said, cycle paths, from time to time, come on to the capital works program through the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. In this year's budget, we do not have any budget vote for cycle paths. What we have is a

grant to the peak, which is the \$18 000-odd, and we continue the elite program in the institute, which comes up in the next output.

Mr CONLON: Okay. Thank you, Dr Ritchie. Minister, what has the Northern Territory government done under Output 4.1 in Sports Development, in the way of swimming?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, we have done a lot. There are numerous things that we have done for swimming in sport, including infrastructure. In this particular output, we have given \$55 000 to Swimming Northern Territory Incorporated. When we get to the right output for facilities and fixtures, I will talk about the infrastructure put into Alice Springs in the aquatic centre and the ...

Ms CARNEY: Point of order, Mr Chairman. Sorry, we are genuinely having a lot of trouble hearing you. Did you say that you allocated money to the Northern Territory Incorporated?

Mr BONSON: Swimming Northern Territory Incorporated.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, it is Swimming Northern Territory Incorporated.

Mr BONSON: Yes. Sorry, members of the committee. Anyone who knows me, I am a very quiet person – very shy.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, you are a big bloke, Matt. Come on, step up!

Mr BONSON: I talk softly, but I will try to speak up.

Ms CARNEY: Tall people can speak loudly, come on.

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, \$55 000 is what we delivered through the peak sport and recreation grants programs. We believe it is money well spent, and I know that the swimming community think it is well spent. When we get down to facilities and fixtures, I will gladly talk about the investment we have made into infrastructure, as well.

Mr CONLON: Okay. Thank you, minister. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, one of the strongest associations with participation with sport and recreation rates is the education level maintained. With parents not being forced to send their kids to school and truancy being such a huge problem throughout the Northern Territory, what does this mean for the future of participation sport and recreation in the Northern Territory?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I think all of us understand the importance of sport and recreation in our social structure, both before and after school, on weekends and during the week. Regarding truancy and the effect of participation at school, I argue - and I am sure many people in this room would argue - that those individuals who participate in any type of sport and recreation, organised or unorganised, are more likely to take positive steps in their life, to participate in school, participate in work, and participate in the social fabric. I throw to Dr Ritchie, in regard to any other programs that might be specific.

Dr RITCHIE: Minister, I have nothing to add to that.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, can you tell the committee what percentage of Alice Springs participants are selected in Northern Territory representative sides?

Mr BONSON: Just bear with us. Dr Ritchie will respond.

Dr RITCHIE: If you look at all levels, the task of compiling that would be quite enormous and not something we do. However, once you go up to the more elite levels, it is possible to get that information for you, in the next output in Institute of Sports. If you would accept that as an answer, we can do that.

Mr CONLAN: Dr Ritchie, I did say representative side, so I would assume that would be an elite level anyway.

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, what is considered to be elite level in the NTIS - there is a structured criteria, and when you get to that appropriate output we will talk about that. There are many different types of representative sides, at all different levels. As far as I know, the department does not micro-manage selection of those kids.

Dr RITCHIE: We are not compiling those statistics of individual sports, but we do keep records of those that we are directly funding; so we do have it for the institute.

Mr CONLAN: Would you not think that it would be important to assess the sports development from the regions of the Northern Territory, so then you could decide areas that might need attention or might not need attention? I would have thought that, to keep track of participants from Alice Springs, Tennant Creek or Katherine, it would be very important to the Department of Sport and Recreation, and particularly of interest to you.

Mr BONSON: There are a number of activities that we do in the regions and in remote areas and urban and rural areas, to encourage participation in both sport and recreation. There are numerous programs that we are running. If I understand the line of questioning though, and I do not want to presume, but it seems to be how many representatives from Alice Springs, or from the regions, are in representative sides compared to Katherine, Tennant, or compared to Darwin?

Mr CONLAN: No. Mr Chairman, may I ask the original question again? What percentage of Alice Springs participants are selected in Northern Territory representative sides?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie, I do not know if there is much more we can add, but if you can, please do.

Dr RITCHIE: I need to reiterate that we do not keep that information in the department. We believe that the way sport is decentralised in the Northern Territory, it would be very difficult to obtain from the various sporting bodies involved. We maintain that information for the athletes supported through the institute. We also maintain, of course, information on inputs to all this, which is the money into all those regions. We can help you there too, if that is useful.

Mr CONLAN: Would you be able to provide that information from the Northern Territory Institute of Sport?

Mr BONSON: What we are hearing, member for Greatorex, is quite clear: we can provide that for NTIS, or some semblance of that. It is appropriate that we make a large investment into the NTIS. However, regarding levels which are not at that NTIS level, again, I defer to Dr Ritchie to clarify. We do not keep those numbers. Is that correct?

Dr RITCHIE: No, we do not keep them other than the institute. Member for Greatorex, we can provide you with the names of all the athletes from Alice Springs who are supported by the program.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The names of athletes?

Dr RITCHIE: Supported by the Institute of Sport ...

Mr BONSON: The Chairman is quite correct. It has to be the numbers ...

Mr CONLAN: The numbers from Alice Springs, particularly.

Dr RITCHIE: We derive the numbers by counting them.

Mr CONLAN: Where they originally came from.

Mr BONSON: What we are saying, very clearly, though, this is not the right output. I think the Chairman is probably going to make that point.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is ...

Mr CONLAN: It is regional development.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Wait a sec there. The numbers that we have, Dr Ritchie, that are easily accessible, are the ones relating to the NTIS? Is that correct?

Dr RITCHIE: Mr Chairman, I can answer the question from the member for Greatorex. As modified, that the number of athletes supported by the Institute of Sport from Alice Springs is 21.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, 21. Thank you, Dr Ritchie.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will just say that the minister is right in saying that the question could have been left until then ...

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, I cannot help it if ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, let me finish. What I am going to say is, do not go into a whole series of questions about the NTIS now.

Mr CONLAN: I did not bring up the NTIS, Mr Chairman. The minister did. My single question was what percentage of Alice Springs participants were selected in Northern Territory representative sides and there was no answer. The department and the minister were unable to provide an answer ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just in case you were about to ...

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Can I then just ask them please - perhaps Dr Ritchie through you, minister: at a guess, are you able to provide a ballpark figure of how many Alice Springs participants are represented in Northern Territory sides?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I think Dr Ritchie has ...

Mr CONLAN: I think he has.

Mr BONSON: The reality is that we cannot keep the generalised numbers of what you asked before. We do keep elite level numbers. It was a courtesy of Dr Ritchie to give you that number outside of the output. However, the Chairman has made it quite clear that we will answer questions on the Northern Territory Institute of Sport in the right output.

In terms of how many participants, it is my understanding that Alice Springs historically has and, no doubt always will, punched above their weight in numbers. Anyone who knows anything about sports in the Northern Territory has heard of the McAdams, the Hamptons, the Bowdens, and many other elite athletes who came from Alice Springs. They have added to - I claim them. I claim Darryl White as a Territorian because we are all in it together. I do not know if there is any more you want to add to that, Dr Ritchie?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, you do realise, though, that not all Northern Territory representatives are at the Northern Territory Institute of Sport?

Mr BONSON: I think we have made that quite clear.

Mr CONLAN: So, would you be able to provide those figures for us?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The answer has already been given.

Mr BONSON: I do not know if I have much more to add to the fact that we do not micro-manage to the level of the Under 14s soccer team or the Under 16s women's netball team, and who is representative of what. Anyone who knows anything about sport knows that there is large participation of athletes from all over the Territory who represent the Territory at all different levels, and I hope that continues.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you be able to table that for all Northern Territory representatives, and not just the Northern Territory Institute of Sport ones?

Mr BONSON: Sorry?

Mr CONLAN: The representatives - all Northern Territory representatives? At some point.

Mr BONSON: Do we have that ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: These are the figures we have been told they do not have.

Mr CONLAN: No, no. I do believe we do have those.

Dr RITCHIE: I will clarify, member for Greatorex. We can do you the data, the breakdown by regional centre by, basically, address of participants in the Institute of Sport program. The participants from Alice

Springs, across all sports in the institute program, for instance, is 21, as I have said. We could do the same for other regional centres.

Mr CONLAN: So, if there is a Northern Territory representative side, whatever it may be - if there is a netball side, or a Rugby Union side, or an AFL side - the department has no idea where those people came from originally? Minister, you do not know whether there are - you mentioned Darryl White, who is originally from Alice Springs. You obviously have some idea where some of these people are coming from. I asked if you could give me even a ballpark figure. Do you have any data on that whatsoever?

Mr BONSON: I do not want to be rude, but I will try to clarify what, clearly, has been said and try to put some history to it. In the appropriate output, we can give you numbers on the NTIS, which we fund into the millions, which provides fantastic elite athlete training for a number of sports, which I spoke of in my opening statement. In terms of the other 40 recognised sports that are floating around, being played or participated in, in the whole of the Northern Territory - remote, rural, urban - there are all different levels. I did request ...

Mr CONLAN: A point of order, Mr Chairman! We are talking about Northern Territory representative sides - sides that are travelling interstate representing the Northern Territory.

Mr BONSON: If I could just finish the answer, thank you, Mr Chairman. My understanding is that all different sports have different qualifications on who represents them, and at different levels, different competitions, both internationally and nationally, state, whatever. If there is anything further to that, we can ask Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, our philosophy is that the sports run the sports. We provide grant funding to build the capacity of sports, but the sports run the sports. We do not exert any influence or keep statistics on the details of people selected in sides. As the minister said, there would be over 40 sports in the Northern Territory that have representative sides. They have those representative sides at all levels; many of them from Under 13s through to Under 18s, through to adults, both male and female. It would be a logistical nightmare to get the data and keep that information. We do not collect it, primarily because the sports are responsible for those selections.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you. Minister, what is the average cost for a junior sports person to play for the Northern Territory in an interstate carnival?

Mr BONSON: Mr Rossingh, do we have any relevant figures on that question?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, I cannot point you to hard and fast data but, from my personal experience, having children who have represented the Northern Territory, a representative Territory side on the east coast, in an east coast-based competition, would generally be between \$1500 and, say, \$2500. Many of those representative sides are through Schools Sports NT and not through the peak representative bodies.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. So the average is about \$1500?

Mr ROSSINGH: \$1500 as a rule of thumb.

Mr CONLAN: You do not have that data with you, or you do not keep that data?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, no, we do not keep that data.

Mr CONLAN: Of the total grant pool, what percentage goes to Darwin, and what percentage goes to the rest of the Northern Territory?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Greatorex, for the question. We suspected that this question might come up, I suppose, for want of a better way to describe it. Mr Rossingh, have you anything to add?

Mr ROSSINGH: Just bear with us. Again, member for Greatorex, sometimes what sounds like simple questions are actually quite complex. A great proportion of the grant funding program goes to support peak sporting bodies, which have a Territory-wide responsibility. In our calculations here, we have eliminated them from the equation because they do have a Territory-wide responsibility. In the proportions of funding that have gone to certain regional areas - for example 29.5% of grant funding in 2007-08 went to the Alice

Springs region. As another example, 12.1% went to the Katherine region. I do not have a total breakdown for the Territory, just certain regions. We can provide a total breakdown if you require.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, please, if you would not mind.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Perhaps then, you should re-state the question.

Mr CONLAN: Would you be prepared to table that document with the breakdown?

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, we can table the breakdowns, but we cannot give you a total picture for the whole Territory. We can give you, for example, Darwin, Alice Springs, the Katherine region and Tennant Creek. That is what we have with us tonight.

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shall we then avoid a question on notice, or do you want the other regions as well?

Mr CONLAN: And the total breakdown, I think it was. There was another document you were going to provide.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was the total breakdown. What I understand is that you have four regions which you can give now, but if you wanted all of the Territory, that would have to be taken on notice.

Mr CONLAN: Yes. Okay. Can I have both?

Mr BONSON: Can I clarify what you would like to pick up. As pointed out by Mr Rossingh, we can give figures on Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, and Darwin. But for other areas of the Territory, it is more difficult to give exact figures. There are other areas outside those areas that are very important to this government. I will have Mr Rossingh to table those documents.

Mr CONLAN: Could we take the other one on notice? I would like both. The ones that I have now about the four major regions and ...

Question on Notice No 9.1

Mr CHAIRMAN: I was going to suggest that you simply put on notice the question of a breakdown for each region and, then, the four that they can give you now would be a partial completion of that request and you would just be waiting for the outstanding regions. I will get you to re-state the question.

Mr CONLAN: The whole question, certainly, Mr Chairman. Of the total grant pool, what percentage goes to Darwin and what percentage goes to the rest of the Northern Territory?

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

Mr BONSON: Yes, I am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 9.1.

Dr RITCHIE: Mr Chairman, for the record, in response to question No 9.1, we will provide the answers to Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine and also Litchfield Region – so the balance.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Ritchie. Thank you, minister. Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have no further questions on Output 4.1.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions on Output 4.1?

Mrs BRAHAM: If I could, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, the Masters Games is coming up. You are aware that, in Alice Springs, it generates more for the economy than the Arafura Games here in Darwin. Are you aware of that?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, the interesting thing about the Masters Games - and maybe we should have clarified it - it is my understanding now that it is actually a major event – this is only a recent reallocation internally within the NT government. I will pass you to Dr Ritchie to see if he has anything to add.

Dr RITCHIE: There is nothing really other than to say that it is with Major Events because of its status, and it is one of the outputs with Chief Minister's.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, as no doubt you will be involved in them, it would be a good idea on your part if you kept an eye on the development of the Masters Games. We do not want the local involvement to be disadvantaged by being taken over by Major Events. What I am saying is, it has been run very successfully for a number of years by locals and volunteers. We do not want it stuffed up. You cannot give me other information of how much is actually being contributed because that is with a different department. Is that what you are saying?

Mr BONSON: As a reassurance, member for Braitling, I have visited Alice Springs many times over the last 25 years playing sport and visiting family and friends. However, in this role, I was there to talk about the Masters Games and I will be there next week. I can assure you that there are some very strong representatives - as some would argue in parliament - from Alice Springs, who are definitely vocal about the need for Alice Springs to maintain its independence. We work together, but I can assure you that I have observed that, and they are doing a great job.

Mrs BRAHAM: Was that a list of grants you were tabling? I was not quite sure what the member for Greatorex was receiving? The sports grants, is that what you have tabled?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: What we were tabling was a breakdown of the grants made under this output by those six regions.

Mrs BRAHAM: So the sports grants submissions are in? Have they been decided for this year?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Member for Braitling, I will just pass you onto Mr Rossingh. In brief, the sports grants are at different times for different grant programs.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Braitling, do you have a particular grant program you wanted to ask about, or just generally?

Mrs BRAHAM: I was hoping to get a list of grants that have been distributed over the last financial year. Is that what you have tabled for the member for Greatorex?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, are we talking about the year that has gone, or the year into the future?

Mrs BRAHAM: I just noticed you have an increase in funding in the budget for grants. Is that because last year you distributed larger amount of grants, or are you anticipating that the grant money is going to be used for any special events?

Mr BONSON: I will defer to Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: For the ongoing grant programs, there was an increase of \$380 000 between 2007-08 and 2008-09 into the coming year. That has been allocated across quite a few of the different programs. The biggest component of that has gone to peak sport and recreation bodies, but there has also been an increase into our local governing bodies' grants program, facilities development, the National League Incentive Program and also the Grassroots Development Programs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do recreational officers on communities come under your portfolio? If so, how many do we have and where are they placed?

Mr BONSON: That is a very good question, member for Braitling. There are a number of ways that we can answer this but, my belief and my advice is that we are taking great steps to support Community Sport and Recreation Officers through a number of different mechanisms.

To answer your question, in 2007-08 there was funding of \$1.454m distributed to 52 town councils and organisations across the Territory. This funding supports the employment of Community Sport and Recreation Officers in urban, regional and remote areas, as well as providing additional funding for sport development. A total of 52 Sport and Recreation Officers are employed, 49 full-time and three part-time. Mr Rossingh, can you clarify what has occurred with Sport and Recreation Officers ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I know that, in Docker River, there is a male and a female sport and rec officer who have been highly successful working with that community. Is that a trend when you are putting recreation officers into the bush; that you are doing male and female, or not?

Mr BONSON: That is a very good question, member for Braitling. You are well aware of how Sport and Recreation Officers work. When you get good ones like the two you have just mentioned, they can have a magnificent influence on the wider community. Regarding the policy details and the funding, I will ask Mr Rossingh to give a comprehensive answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Braitling, that is something we are trying to work towards because it is so successful. The other big initiative for this forthcoming financial year is for us to leverage off the local government reforms and creation of the shires to try to pool all the various funding sources that have similar outcomes. There are various Commonwealth funding sources, including the active after-schools communities, the out-of-hours school care program, the substance abuse program, CDEP replacement programs, plus the department's own programs that we are pooling together. That will allow us to engage more Sport and Recreation Officers and, should, in every situation, be able to have a minimum of one male and one female in each location, and hopefully, in many communities, more than that.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is good. That is a trend we should keep up. What direct funding do you give to the municipal councils, including Darwin City Council?

Mr BONSON: Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Braitling, in 2007-08, the funding to local governing bodies was \$1.172m. That was all to non-municipal local governing bodies. The Darwin City Council, Palmerston City Council, the Alice Springs Town Council, and Katherine Town Council did not receive funding through that program.

Mrs BRAHAM: I remember that. There was a bit of an outcry, wasn't there? Are you able to table the list of grants to the non-municipal bodies?

Mr BONSON: I will defer to the advice of Dr Ritchie and Mr Rossingh.

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, we have a document which summarises those grants which we could table now.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you. The Clontarf program is very popular. Minister, could you tell us how much government contributes, how much is contributed by sponsorship business, and how much by the foundation, Polly Farmer?

Mr BONSON: Thank you for the question. The Clontarf program has shown unbelievable potential. I first came into contact with the Clontarf program when I first became an elected member. Obviously, having a passion for Australian Rules football, through my connections I heard about this program being run out of Clontarf in Western Australia. Like anything, there are Territorians everywhere, and there was a Territorian - I will not mention his name, but he is a well-known character - who was actually working there, not in Clontarf but in the arts program. He spoke to me about this program and I travelled there to have a look at it, and met with Gerard Neesham, and spoke to those characters and saw it in operation.

What I was won by was the fact that the Clontarf program sells football as a way to get kids in, but the underlining theme, of course, is educational backgrounds, which you would, obviously, be very interested in, member for Braitling. I was able to bring that back to the Territory and speak to the then Education minister, the current Chief Minister, about this. Like all processes, it took the checks and balances to be

done by the NT government, but we were proud to introduce that into Alice Springs. That is a fantastic thing, and I am happy to see it coming up to the Top End in Katherine and Darwin. Unfortunately, though, this actual question and its budgetary items are an output within the Department of Education, Employment and Training. I am not sure if that answers your question.

In terms of the Polly Farmer situation, again, what a legend – an absolute legend. I am not sure if we do support the Polly Farmer Foundation, but I will defer to Mr Rossingh.

Mrs BRAHAM: If you cannot give us how much government is contributing to that program, could you give us the numbers involved in the program in Alice Springs? I believe there was going to be a girls program set up. Has that started?

Mr BONSON: Yes, member for Braitling, as diplomatically as I can, because I know you are genuinely asking these questions for the information to get it out. Dr Ritchie can clarify what we do know about the program in terms of its numbers.

Dr RITCHIE: This is not a program that we deal with in this department. Informally, we can undertake to get that advice to you, but it is not something we can take on as a question.

Mrs BRAHAM: I find that strange. I know you are saying it is Education, but it is a great sporting program. I would have thought that your department would have their hands on it - all over it, in fact. Still, if we can get that information, I appreciate that. Minister, do you believe that young people who have been suspended should be allowed to continue in that program?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, that is not even anywhere close to this output.

Mrs BRAHAM: Oh well, it was worth a try.

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, you always have a go, I give you that.

Mrs BRAHAM: We have not got to seniors yet. The Enduro ...

Members interjecting.

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one more. The Enduro bike race in Alice Springs was held recently and was highly successful. Could you perhaps tell me then what involvement your department may have had in it?

Mr BONSON: Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Braitling, it was an event that was organised by the cycling fraternity themselves. It is good that they had the capacity and the ability to be able to run such an event without close involvement from the department.

Mrs BRAHAM: So, what you are really saying to us, that most of the sporting clubs throughout the Territory organise most of their own events. I am a little confused about what your department does, minister.

Mr BONSON: The short and sweet is that we provide a number of funding options for all sports, through an application process, because the Northern Territory government believes in supporting sport and recreation for the benefits that the wider community get. In how they run and operate internally, the only real checks and balances that we provide - and I will stand corrected if Mr Rossingh wants to add anything different - but really, what support our officers can give them in running their organisation, and whatever that might be, and also the funding opportunities. I am not sure if Mr Rossingh would like to expand on that.

Mr ROSSINGH: Under this output, our most significant involvement is in the grants program which, for this coming year is \$8.77m. There are over eight different programs, most of which are application driven. There is a great deal of work in, first, the advertising and getting some awareness about the programs; second, in processing and assessing those applications, making the decisions, processing the grants, the money, but, importantly, making sure that the objectives of the grants are being achieved during the course and, ultimately, acquitted. Under this output, we run a number a number of different participation development programs. If I can just go down a bit of a list of some of the ones we have run this year. We

have run the three Sports Development Seminars in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine. Community Coaches ...

Mr BONSON: Sorry, Mr Rossingh, could you expand on those seminars and what actually occurred in them, because that is useful for people to know.

Mr ROSSINGH: The seminars provide a variety of sessions and workshops across relevant sporting issues, whether it is something as basic as how to complete grant applications, how to develop a business plan for your sporting organisation, or tips on coaching. A whole variety of relevant sporting issues are dealt with at those seminars.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, what is your tip for the AFL Northern Territory side? Where will it be based?

Mr BONSON: Very interesting question, member for Braitling. In terms of what we do to support the AFL in their endeavours to get a team down south, I will get these exact figures, because they are a good news story. If you bear with me ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Just give me your gut feeling, what do you reckon it is going to be? When and where?

Mr BONSON: We are going to be providing \$200 000 per annum to the Australian Football League Northern Territory for five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13. We see this as a real investment in Aussie Rules. We all know how passionate Territorians are. Our participation rate, the last figure I knew off the top of my head, me being a mad AFL supporter, was between 27 to 33 Territorians running around in the AFL comp from all regions. We have some shown a history, over a long period of time, of producing AFL football players. It is very passionate about where it wants to go. I have spoken to the members in both Alice and Darwin, plus the general community, and they are very passionate about where the teams should be based.

The real answer though, I suppose, is that we are providing the appropriate body, the Northern Territory Football League with \$200 000. They have made some announcements about where they have been negotiating, which is both the South Australian national football league and the West Australian football league. It is my understanding, though, that the CEO of AFL NT, is in negotiations with the AFL about a team into Queensland. As a sports person, I can understand the passion for people to enter into a South Australian, Western Australian league. Also, as an administrator in charge of a budget myself, I realise how important it is to punch within your means and deliver the services you want. I can understand why the pressure is on to go with the Queensland option.

In short, we think that \$200 000 we will be providing, the Commonwealth monies, plus what the AFL provides in any sponsorship, is good for young people in the Territory. We know we are going to be playing games in Alice Springs and the Top End and footballers from both those codes, from whatever background, whatever culture, will do a fantastic job in representing the Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

Output 4.2 - Northern Territory Institute of Sport

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call on questions relating to Output 4.2, Northern Territory Institute of Sport. Member for Greatorex?

Mr BONSON: Thank you – oh, I am sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: About what? Just ask a question?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I have a question. Did you want to make a statement, minister?

Mr BONSON: No, I am all fired up, member for Greatorex. I was about to go off and give a spiel, but ...

Mr CONLAN: Go for it, please.

Mr BONSON: I just wanted to say that we have officers here who are quite qualified in answering questions. I also have support staff from the Institute of Sport, Dr Ian Ford. Without giving him too much of

a wrap, he is a long-term Territorian, who has studied all over the country and is highly rated as an administrator and sports psychologist. I am sure he could do a lot of work in this room. Member for Greatorex, I will leave it at that.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, minister. A couple of questions on the NTIS. Can you tell the committee, what codes of conduct apply to athletes or staff on interstate sporting trips and, if so, would you be able to table that code of conduct?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Thank you, minister. It would be probably simpler to just table it. Oh, sorry, we do not have it with us, but we can take it on notice, and give it to you.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you.

Question on Notice No 9.2

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could restate the question, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: Certainly. Would you please table the code of conduct for athletes and staff on interstate sporting trips?

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

Mr BONSON: We will take that on notice, thank you, Mr Chair.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 9.2.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you Mr Chairman. Minister, have there been any investigations, either internal or external, or formal or informal investigations, into any issues or activities that have arisen when staff or athletes were on interstate trips in the last two years?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: In answer to the member's question, there has been one incident investigated internally by the department relating to a sporting team travelling interstate.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, would you be able to provide details of that incident, or expand on that?

Mr BONSON: Obviously, with any type of matter like this, there would be checks and balances. I will defer to Dr Ritchie in regard to what information we table or talk about.

Dr RITCHIE: The matter has been investigated and closed. The privacy of those people involved will be an issue. We could take that on notice and provide some details of that incident, stripped of the individuals' names, if that would be helpful?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, certainly. Thank you.

Question on Notice No 9.3

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question for *Hansard* please, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: Could you provide details of any investigations into any issues or activities that have arisen when staff or athletes are on interstate trips in the last two years?

Dr RITCHIE: To clarify, and that the answer will have the names of ...

Mr CONLAN: Deleted. Yes, certainly.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you need to seek some advice as to how much information, then certainly do that. I allocate that question No 9.3.

Mr CONLAN: Just the nature of the incident.

Mr CONLAN: A follow-up question to that one: have there been complaints from parents about any of the alleged incidents? Or this particular incident?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I respect the fact that there are sensitive issues here, but I defer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Thank you, minister. This particular incident is the only one. It was initiated by complaint of parents.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, have there been any break-ins, or thefts of any assets or equipment from the Northern Territory Institute of Sport?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Mr Ritchie – sorry, Dr Ritchie; he is a doctor and I am sorry for not addressing him in the appropriate manner.

Dr RITCHIE: There has been one minor incident which involved a laptop computer stolen from a coach's car; the laptop was subsequently recovered.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. Minister, would you be prepared to table this new NTIS Asset Register?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Mr McInnes.

Mr McINNES: Dwayne McInnes, Chief Finance Officer. We can, with the minister's permission, table the Asset Register. However, we would need to strip out other assets that would be in that register.

Mr BONSON: I have been informed, member for Greatorex, if we could take that question on notice we will have that information to you at the earliest possible time. If you can just bear with us for a moment, member for Greatorex, for clarification by Mr McInnes.

Mr McINNES: The reason why I say we have to strip out other assets, there are whole-of-department assets in there as well; it is not just restricted to this output group.

Mr CONLAN: Certainly.

Question on Notice No 9.4

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question for *Hansard* purposes?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you please table the NTIS Asset Register?

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

Mr BONSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 9.4.

Mr CONLAN: There are no more questions on this output for me.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many sports are represented at the NT Institute of Sport? I know you said that you have it in your papers that there are about 120 participants, but I am just wondering ...

Mr BONSON: My advice is that there are 150 athletes altogether but, in sports, there are 10 sports programs, which are Australian Rules football, cricket, cycling, hockey, netball, Rugby League, Rugby Union, tennis, tenpin bowling and weightlifting. There are other individual scholarships and athletes. I will defer to the appropriate person, Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: With respect, for the detail of this, my Executive Director, Mr Rossingh, would be best placed to answer.

Mr ROSSINGH: As the minister said, there are 10 squad programs, which the minister listed. In addition to that, there is a capacity for individual athletes to receive scholarships that are not part of one of those squad programs. Those individual athletes are from sports which are not squad programs, which include athletics, iron man triathlon and standard triathlon, judo, wheelchair basketball, tennis, touch Rugby, sailing – did I say swimming? - and baseball. They are the sports that individual athletes have scholarships for, which are not squad programs.

Mr BONSON: One of the questions was the total number, if I can just clarify that for the member for Braiitling. My advice is there are 150, but I will just clarify that. Is that correct?

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes.

Mr BONSON: Yes, I have been informed that it is 150, member for Braiitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you still have a representative from the institute working in the Alice Springs office?

Mr BONSON: Mr Rossingh has informed me that we do. Do you want to talk to this?

Mrs BRAHAM: Is that Brad Tessman? No. Okay.

Mr CONLAN: He is still there, Loraine.

Mrs BRAHAM: He is still there. I had not seen him around for a while. That is it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: As there are no further questions on the Northern Territory Institute of Sport, that concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

Output 4.3 – Facilities and Fixtures

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions relating to Output 4.3, Facilities and Fixtures. Are there any questions?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you let the community know many Sport and Recreation staff are at Sports House?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will go by your lead, minister. I will rule the question out, possibly on this output, but I will certainly allow it under Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions output, but I will defer. I do not see it coming within Facilities and Fixtures.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I will just clarify with Dr Ritchie that there is a relevance within this output. Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: It does not strictly relate to Facilities and Fixtures, but the number is 14.

Mr CONLAN: Fourteen. Thank you. Minister, seeing as Dr Ritchie is prepared to answer that question, can I ask how many Sport and Recreation staff were in Sports House in 2001?

Mr BONSON: It is my understanding of the process, Mr Chairman, that there will be general questions at the end.

Mr CONLAN: All right, we can leave it to the end, if you like.

Mr BONSON: I was just thinking that it is more appropriate that the committee run to schedule, if that is all right with you?

Mr CONLAN: Okay. We will save those for the Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions. Maybe you know where I am going with those, minister. What is the fixed seating capacity at the Marrara Indoor Stadium? I notice the paper has stated that, on occasions, around 1400 people have attended basketball games at Marrara Stadium. Is this correct?

Mr BONSON: We hold a number of events there, member for Greatorex, involved in sport and recreation and others, but there is a capacity level there. My understanding is that the capacity is at 1200. I am unaware of any issues with that, but I will get Dr Ritchie to answer that. My understanding is that it is 1200 for fixed seating.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, did you have something to add to that, Dr Ritchie?

Dr RITCHIE: That is what the fixed seating accommodates.

Mr CONLAN: So, 1200 fixed seating, and there is some temporary seating as well, I believe?

Mr BONSON: As you would know, member for Greatorex, as pointed out by the members of this House - and everyone knows that I played a bit of basketball in my time over the years - with the fixed seating, what basically happens is that you have the ability at Marrara to bring the fixed seating out of the walls on, like a sliding scale, and that makes it the 1200, and you can pack it away. For any clarification on that, I will allow Dr Ritchie to answer.

Dr RITCHIE: The fixed seating is 1200, but there is space in the corporate area where you can bring out additional chairs.

Mr CONLAN: So, essentially temporary seating. Minister, what health and safety procedures do you have in place for that temporary seating at Marrara?

Mr BONSON: Thank you for your question, member for Greatorex. I will allow Dr Ritchie to answer that.

Dr RITCHIE: We understand that the use of all the furniture at Marrara complies with occupational health and safety rules - it is chairs.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, including that temporary set-up, it is covered?

Dr RITCHIE: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you, Dr Ritchie. Minister, has the grandstand at Traeger Park been handed over to the Alice Springs Town Council yet?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, as you may be aware, there is a story to tell about the facility at Traeger Park, and you know the story goes back for a number of years now. I believe it has, potentially, a great ending. I suppose I have to answer the question before I talk about the history of it.

The Northern Territory government committed \$5.61m to upgrade sporting facilities at Traeger Park in Traeger Park Sporting Complex in Alice Springs. Of course, this included a grandstand at a cost of in excess of \$3m. There was other issues dealt with in that area of \$800 000 to the hockey service, the \$3.11m to replace the football oval grandstand, and \$1.7m to construct the AFL night match standard lights at the oval.

This has been completed since July 2007, and there has been long ongoing discussion between the Alice Springs Town Council and the NT government about the facility regarding the grandstand. As you would be aware - well, you might not be aware but others might be - I have played on that magnificent oval at Traeger Park and I have watched some great grand finals there. I remember watching a Souths versus Pioneers grand final down there when Souths famously got up in the last quarter. I know what type of infrastructure they had at that time. This government - and I know the members of Central Australia - are quite proud of the facility in Traeger Park and the investment it that.

I have met with Damien Ryan, the newly-elected Alice Springs Mayor. I met with the previous Alice Springs Mayor, Fran Kilgariff - a name that is synonymous with Central Australia and ...

Mr CONLAN: Yes, minister. With the greatest respect, this is a great story you are telling but it is not really answering the question. Has the grandstand at Traeger Park been handed over to the Alice Springs Town Council?

Mr BONSON: I met with Fran Kilgariff ...

Mr CONLAN: A great name in Central Australia.

Mr BONSON: Great name in Central Australia, and I am happy you agree with.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, is there some sort of point of order here?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, if you could come round. I figured you were about to anyway, but, yes.

Mr BONSON: The answer comes to the conclusion of a meeting I recently held in the last visit with Damien Ryan - a long-term local newly elected, who comes to the council with plenty of energy, and takes his position very seriously. He has given me an assurance he will work with me to resolve this dispute which is going on. We believe we are working towards that, and I am confident we can resolve this issue in the way it should.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, could you please tell the committee what the issue is?

Mr BONSON: My understanding of the issue regarding the Alice Springs Town Council is that they are willing to work with us to resolve outstanding issues to do with the grandstand and the ownership of it, and we are more than willing to do that with them.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Chairman, I am just a bit confused about that answer. What is the actual issue again, minister?

Mr BONSON: Okay, just to clarify. When the NT government made this \$5.61m commitment to the Traeger Park Sporting Complex, there was a working group set up. That working group was made up of different stakeholders, including the Alice Springs Town Council. The NT government through Sport and Recreation was represented on that, and so were other interested bodies. Mr Rossingh can confirm the results of that working group and what they were able to achieve and what we are working towards.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, the process for these sorts of capital grants and capital works is that a project control group is established. The role of the project control group is to agree upon the scope of the works. The project control group, which is broadly represented, will come up with a design. That design will be costed by a quantity surveyor and matched against the budget that is available. If the estimated cost is greater than the budget that is available, the project control group, as a representative group, works together to work out which elements of the design can be removed from the scope so that the project comes within budget. This project control group agreed on certain removals from the initial scope and that is the scope that was then translated into the final design which was constructed.

Mr CONLAN: Without the top floor completed. That is clearly the piece of the design that was removed to fit in within budget, minister. That is the issue.

Mr BONSON: Yes, member for Greatorex, I understand the issue. And I understand the point you are trying to make. Mr Rossingh has made the point that the working committee had agreed that what we have in Traeger Park - a magnificent facility for not only Australian Football, but cricket - was the outcome that the working group agreed on. Is that correct, Mr Rossingh?

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes, that is correct.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Rossingh. With great respect, it is a wonderful answer from Mr Rossingh, but it is not the answer to the question that I put to you, minister, which was: what is the actual issue here? Why will the Alice Springs Town Council not take over the grandstand?

Mr BONSON: Like any representative body, they are very keen to ensure that they get the best deal for their constituents. In this case, both our constituents are the same; it is the great people of Alice Springs. I can reassure this Estimates Committee, and you as the member for Greatorex, a representative of Central Australia, that I have met with Damien Ryan. Damien Ryan and I have agreed that the past is the past. We understand we might agree to disagree on certain issues into the future, but we will work through those in an amicable way. I can assure people in Alice Springs who might be listening to this broadcast, or reading the *Hansard*, that I give you an undertaking that as we progress the issues that have been raised with me by stakeholder groups in Alice Springs who use the facility, including the owners, the Alice Springs Town Council, we will come up with a solution to the problems we face.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, it sounds like you have just – well, you have just said that the people of Alice Springs are interested in getting the best deal for the community ...

Mr BONSON: The Alice Springs Town Council.

Mr CONLAN: The Alice Springs Town Council - the best deal for the people of Alice Springs. So, I guess in some roundabout way you are saying that this is a bit of a raw deal for the people of Alice Springs?

Mr BONSON: No, I did not say that. What I said is that the Alice Springs Town Council is doing what all representative bodies should do for their constituents - fight for the best deal for their constituents. In this case, they have the same constituency as the Northern Territory government. We represent the same individuals in Alice Springs, and we both want the best deal for Central Australia and Traeger Park. I am giving a commitment here tonight to work with Damien Ryan and the newly-elected council which is fresh, vibrant, and open to negotiations. I went there – I do not know, I cannot think the date I went there - and had a beautiful dinner with Damien Ryan and other leaders of ...

Mr CONLAN: Beautiful dinner?

Mr BONSON: ... of Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: You would be hard pressed to get a bad one in Alice Springs, would you not?

Mr BONSON: That is right. Beautiful down there, the outback steakhouse, of course.

Mr CONLAN: The Overlanders.

Mr BONSON: It was sensational there. People are enthusiastic, as the members from Central Australia would know, and the new council is energetic and wants to resolve this issue. I do not know if there is really much more I can add.

Mr CONLAN: You could actually provide us with an answer. Minister, I am still a bit unclear. You have said you made a commitment to resolve this. What is that actual commitment?

Mr BONSON: To work with Alice Springs Town Council on what is needed to satisfactorily bring this issue to a conclusion.

Mr CONLAN: Can I ask you then: what are the concerns of the Alice Springs Town Council? What concerns have they brought or raised with you as to why they will not take the grandstand?

Mr BONSON: There are a number of issues they have raised. I have written and articulated our concerns to Damien Ryan. I defer to Mr Rossingh. I am not sure if he can add any more to what I have said, but if he can, I ask him to.

Mr CONLAN: Poor old Steve!

Dr RITCHIE: I cannot add anything more to what the minister is saying. It is a negotiation and the minister and the department are confident that it will be satisfactorily resolved.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Ritchie. So it is a negotiation between the Northern Territory government, you, as the minister for Sport, and the Alice Springs Town Council. If you have been in dialogue with Damien Ryan, what concerns has he raised with you regarding this issue?

Mr BONSON: He made it quite clear that, as a newly-elected Mayor of Alice Springs, he wanted to get across all the issues.

Mr CONLAN: What are the issues, minister? What is the issue? What is the core issue? What is just one issue that he has raised with you with regards to this?

Mr BONSON: Damien, as a newly-elected Mayor of Alice Springs, has made it quite clear that he is more than willing to work with me into the future about resolving these issues. He needs to understand what the issues are. He has made it quite clear to me that he will be relying on advice from the Alice Springs Town Council staff, which he should as they have a corporate history on this. There are individuals

like stakeholder groups such as Cricket NT who had representatives on this board, who know the history of these matters - and the AFL etcetera. We have nothing to be ...

Ms CARNEY: Ashamed about?

Mr BONSON: ... concerned about in terms of the Northern Territory government's commitment to Traeger Park. We love Traeger Park and we want to go to Traeger Park ...

Mrs MILLER: Just answer the question.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, I will speak to Damien because I know him quite well. I will ask him his concerns and I will let you know what his concerns are. So when someone asks you this question again, you might be able to, at least, provide an answer. It is unbelievable that you cannot even give us one issue, considering you have been in such a dialogue with the Alice Springs Town Council, as you say - and the former Mayor, Fran Kilgariff.

Mr BONSON: If I could answer the question - or was that a statement? I do not know. However, I will attempt to answer the line of questioning. I do not know what language I am speaking but, quite clearly, I have met with Damien Ryan, I met with the former Mayor. We talked about these issues. I believe that we are working towards resolving these issues. We have a strategy to reconvene the working group to discuss all matters regarding Traeger Park. Mr Rossingh, if you could just outline what that would entail?

Mr ROSSINGH: The working group, ultimately, wants to take a broader strategic view to this matter and develop, if you like, a master plan for any ongoing development for the Traeger Park precinct - not just the grandstand but the whole precinct. It wants to work very closely with the Sports Facilities Advisory Committee, which is chaired by the Alice Springs Town Council, to ensure that the sporting community of Alice Springs is providing the priorities for future funding. If further enhancement of the Traeger Park grandstand comes at the top of that list then, certainly, that is what I will be conveying to the minister. If something else is identified through that representative group as a priority, then that is what will be put forward.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Rossingh. I am sorry that you have to keep answering for the minister. I would have thought the minister might be able to, at least, provide some information there. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I have a point of clarification, if I may, member for Greatorex. You tabled this document, *Community Sport and Recreation Officer's Funding*. We have pages 2 of 4 and 3 of 4. Was that all there is, or have we lost a couple of pages somewhere in our process?

Mrs BRAHAM: That is all I asked for - the recreation officers and where they were.

Mr ROSSINGH: Yes, that is the entirety of the brief relevant to this issue.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is okay. I just wanted to make sure, thank you.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, could you please inform the committee why the brick paved area at the back of the main grandstand at Marrara is used for car parking, and bollards are often removed for this? The pavers are now starting to lift and they are stained as a result of cars driving over them. Why is the car park not being used, for starters? Is being able to park there part of the lease?

Mr BONSON: I will defer to Mr Rossingh for any information that he has.

Ms CARNEY: You are handballing that one.

Mr CONLAN: That is why it is called the Sports portfolio. Sorry, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: The Northern Territory government has just entered into a lengthy lease with AFL NT for the use of what is now known as TIO Stadium. Under the lease, it is really up to AFL NT, as long as they keep that facility in good order and meet all of their lease obligations, as to how they use that facility. There are no specific clauses in the lease in relation to the areas that cars can or cannot enter, but it is certainly something that we can look at.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Rossingh. Minister, would you be able to outline the terms of that lease with AFL NT? How much they pay the Northern Territory government for the right to hire the stadium, and how does it compare to the lease fee that soccer pay, or the lease fee that netball pay?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, the information I have provided to me is that a lease for 25 years has been negotiated with AFL NT. Both AFL NT and the NT government have signed the lease and, of course, I, in my position, executed that lease on behalf of the Northern Territory government. The amount is, I believe, to be \$50 000 per year that the AFL NT pay us as tenants. We believe that it takes into account, obviously, the role of government to provide adequate facilities for sport and recreation. The use for sport and recreation is not only AFL having the usage of it, but we have cricket going on there, and we have other major events. We take our responsibility for that infrastructure very seriously. I believe, and I have been assured, that \$50 000 is an equitable amount to have AFL NT pay us. If there is anything else that the Executive Director of Sport and Recreation would like to add, Mr Rossingh, or Dr Ritchie? I do not believe so, Mr Chairman. I think that is what we have.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you be prepared to table the terms of the lease arrangements for the AFL NT?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, any leases that we deal with any stakeholder group, obviously, is in a landlord/tenant situation. It is a contractual agreement and there are commercial-in-confidence issues that come into that. I am willing to take that on notice and seek advice whether it is appropriate to table that lease. If I could take that on notice, it would be much appreciated.

Question on Notice No 9.5

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, if you could restate the question, thank you?

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you be prepared to table the arrangements of the lease of Marrara Stadium to AFL NT?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not want to interfere with that, but the strict answer to that ...

Mr CONLAN: He said he would take it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: He will take it, I know, I am just thinking about the formulation of the question ...

Mr CONLAN: He is going to seek advice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, maybe subject to advice, would you table the terms of the lease?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, fair enough. Subject to advice, minister, would you be prepared to table the lease that AFL NT have with Marrara?

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

Mr BONSON: Yes I am, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I allocate that question No 9.5.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, what steps does the Northern Territory government have in place to ensure patrons at Marrara can enjoy sporting events smoke-free?

Mr BONSON: I will defer for advice from Mr Rossingh, Executive Director Sport and Recreation.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, my understanding is that AFL NT has taken a pretty strong stance on smoking and have instituted a smoking ban for all seating in the grandstand.

Mr CONLAN: So essentially, it is AFL NT; they are required to enforce this as part of their lease arrangements with Marrara; is that right?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I defer to the Deputy Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: AFL NT has taken a strong stance on that. I would need to check the lease to see whether there is a provision or a clause in the lease relating to non-smoking. I would be prepared to do it.

Question on Notice No 9.6

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, if you could restate the question, thank you?

Mr CONLAN: May I say then Mr Chairman, subject to advice, would you be prepared to table that document? Perhaps it is contained in their lease arrangements anyway.

Mr BONSON: Again, Member for Greatorex, subject to advice about the commercial nature of that lease, we will accept that on notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay I will allocate that question No 9.6.

Mr CONLAN: I still have a few questions, Mr Chairman, but if you did want to have a break ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Did you want to have a break, minister and your advisors?

Mr BONSON: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, let us just have a couple of minutes break and we will come back to it. Thank you.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If everyone is good to go, we will re-start. Member for Greatorex, do you have further questions on Output 4.3?

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, can you guarantee that international cricket can be scheduled at Marrara, as well as the AFL NT in the interstate league? How many games will be scheduled in Alice Springs? As this is a government-owned venue and is sponsored by the government guaranteed financial service - that is, TIO - does this present a conflict of interest with the Commonwealth Bank, which is a major sponsor of the cricket? A couple of questions there. One at a time, if you like.

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, as you have pointed out there is a number of questions. I am not sure, if you could clarify one first, otherwise, we will ...

Mr CONLAN: Okay, I will ask the first question again. Can you guarantee that international cricket can be scheduled at Marrara, as well as the AFL NT interstate games, if and when the AFL NT becomes part of an interstate league?

Mr BONSON: I defer to my Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Member for Greatorex, there will be no conflict or even potential conflict in this current year. For future years, the right of resumption clauses in the lease will ensure that there will be no conflict.

Mr CONLAN: Mr Rossingh, through you, minister, how you can guarantee that?

Mr BONSON: There is just one point of clarification. As we know, at Marrara – if you know Marrara complex - there are two ovals off the TIO Stadium and the Marrara cricket ground. You are talking about TIO, I take it, as the major stadium?

Mr CONLAN: Yes.

Mr BONSON: Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: We will schedule to ensure there is no conflict. I am confident that we will be able to do that.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, because pitch surface is a major concern, you know that, for the AFL NT. They will not go near a ground unless there has been no cricket for at least, I believe, at a minimum, two weeks.

Mr BONSON: Member for Grotorex, I have been advised a one-week turnaround. After a series like this, and with major events like this, the NT government is proud of its recent record in delivering these international cricket matches and AFL matches. We are aware that this provides a real social infrastructure into our wider community. But for more detail about the turnaround period, I will defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh, in regard to his knowledge of the question.

Mr ROSSINGH: As part of this process of getting the pitches ready to be dropped in, and dealing with the rehabilitation after the pitches are lifted out again, we have been establishing good group relationship with the Queensland Cricket Association. The two Head Curators of the QCA are Kevin Mitchell Senior and Junior; they have been operating that facility for literally decades, with Kevin Mitchell Senior and his advice. We have the situation this year where we have the Masters of Australian Football Carnival three weeks after the conclusion of the third one-day match, and his advice to me has been that it would be ready to play football one week after the day of the last match. I take him at his advice, because he is a leading expert.

Mr CONLAN: All right, that is good to hear. Thank you, Mr Rossingh. Minister, how many of those games will be scheduled in Alice Springs?

Mr BONSON: I defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: The schedule for 2008 is for three one-day matches at TIO Stadium in Darwin. We are currently working through the details of a five-year agreement with Cricket Australia. We have firmly established year one; we have a memorandum of understanding with Cricket Australia to work through a program for the subsequent four years in the five-year agreement, and we are doing that at the moment.

Mr CONLAN: So it was 2008, you say, three games in Darwin?

Mr ROSSINGH: Correct.

Mr CONLAN: The question was: how many games are scheduled in Alice Springs. At this stage, you have not worked through that? Is that right, minister?

Mr BONSON: Through the Chair ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, if I could just interrupt, minister, I have just been advised Hansard is having trouble picking you up. Perhaps you could move the microphone closer to you, to assist.

Mr BONSON: Is that better?

Members interjecting.

Mr BONSON: I am a very shy young man.

Mrs BRAHAM: You are not winning on that one.

Mr BONSON: In regard to the question, I understand where the member for Grotorex is coming from. There have been some important cricket events happen in Alice Springs. I had the pleasure of meeting with Bruce Walker, the Chair of Cricket NT, in Alice Springs. Anyone who has met him would understand that he is very passionate about cricket, and very passionate about Alice Springs. He made it quite clear that he wanted us to ensure that Alice Springs was looked after. I will defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: The two events that the minister is probably referring to are the recent Masters of Cricket match which was played in Alice Springs, and also the annual Imparja Cup series which is played in Alice Springs.

Mr CONLAN: With respect, Mr Rossingh, minister, they are games that have already been played. What about future games?

Mr BONSON: I will defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: The matches that have been scheduled are the three one-day matches in Darwin for this year. No further matches have been scheduled as part of the agreement.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Rossingh. I know you answered that, and I am sorry you had to answer it again. So, minister, there are no future international cricket games scheduled for Alice Springs?

Mr BONSON: I think that has been the advice coming from the department, and there it is.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Minister, the third part of that question was: as a government-owned venue, Marrara is sponsored by the government, guaranteed financial service, which is TIO. Does this present a conflict of interest with the Commonwealth Bank which, of course, sponsors the cricket?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, my advice is, potentially, there could be a conflict between the Commonwealth Bank and TIO, but negotiations are under way, mediation conversations between the two groups. We believe there is a strong chance we can work through those issues, and we will keep the people of the Northern Territory updated.

Mr CONLAN: How far down along these negotiations are we? When do you think you will have this resolved?

Mr BONSON: I have been advised that we are well advanced and we are looking forward to making this happen in the near future. Without preempting how long it will take, we are confident that we are working through them and that both parties will be satisfied with the result.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you. Minister, when will the venue conform to national and international trends of standards of signage?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I will defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: There are clauses in the lease agreement which relate to what has to happen to signage during periods of resumption, so the lease contains provisions for the Northern Territory government to resume the venue for major events. During those major events, depending on negotiations with the sponsor or promoter of the event, it may require all existing signage to be covered, and for a clean venue to be provided. That is provided for in the lease. For example, at the recent Elton John concert, the promoter was not concerned about the signage, so a great deal of it was left uncovered. For cricket, it would probably be fair to say that most, if not all, may be covered.

Mr CONLAN: Through the Chair and you again, minister, what are the costs of actually covering up those existing signs for these events?

Mr ROSSINGH: That is a term of the AFL NT's lease. So, AFL NT is required to provide a clean venue. Those costs are borne by them.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. What conditions have you placed on AFL NT regarding the signage?

Mr BONSON: I defer to M Rossingh, the Executive Director.

Mr ROSSINGH: We are in very well advanced stages of negotiating a match agreement with Cricket Australia. There have been a number of versions of the match agreement, going back and forth. The current version is with Cricket Australia. They told us that they will have some responses to it, early to middle of next week. All those details are still being discussed.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Thank you, Mr Rossingh. Minister, I hope you appreciate the severity of this, because only a few years ago, New Zealand lost a joint hosting of the Rugby World Cup as a result of signage and sponsorship issues, which related directly to the same issue that is happening here or, potentially, at Marrara. It is pretty serious, minister, and we would hate to see us lose some great sporting events as a result of that.

Minister, how many tickets have been made available to the government to the forthcoming Western Bulldogs fixture? Can you provide a list of who they have been given out to?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I just remind us that we are on facilities.

Mr CONLAN: This is a facility, too, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, but the tickets are not.

Mr CONLAN: The Western Bulldogs are playing. I would have thought that this would relate to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I suppose it is a ...

Mr BONSON: Mr Chairman, I have been advised by Executive Director, Mr Rossingh, that this is associated with this fixture, and I can provide information as to allocation of tickets for events.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Mr BONSON: For the record, the Northern Territory government enters into agreements with national and Territory bodies to deliver events. Agreements stipulate an allotment of tickets for the Minister for Sport and Recreation. The allocation for these tickets is determined by the minister's in-house policy. Of the ticket allocations, I will be as thorough as I can, member for Greatorex. Ticket allocations, as per current agreements, for AFL matches we get 30 reserved grandstand seats for all matches at TIO Stadium and Traeger Park, and full use of one corporate box. That is in regard to the facilities at the TIO Stadium. I should also clarify that, to attend Crusty Demons, we had one corporate box facility for 16 people.

Mr CONLAN: How many tickets to Crusty Demons did you give away?

Mr BONSON: I am just getting advice. We gave away all tickets to people who were interested in motor sports and to disadvantaged groups of individuals who might not have the opportunity to attend those events. I suppose it is a bit similar to the advice the Chief Minister gave earlier on in the week; that we take it as an opportunity to give Territorians an opportunity to see events like Crusty Demons and we try to allocate those to people who are either interested in those events, or disadvantaged individuals who otherwise would not get the opportunity to attend.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, how many tickets were there again? Sorry, I am not sure of the total.

Mr BONSON: There was one corporate box facility for 16 people.

Mr CONLAN: Sixteen. That was to Crusty Demons?

Mr BONSON: That was to Crusty Demons.

Mr CONLAN: How many have been made available for the Western Bulldogs game this year?

Mr BONSON: Our agreement, and I will defer to Mr Rossingh to clarify this, but my advice is that we have 30 reserved grandstand seats for all matches at TIO Stadium and Traeger Park, and full use of one corporation box.

Mr CONLAN: So, 30 at each venue?

Mr BONSON: Yes, for the AFL matches.

Mr CONLAN: Altogether? Thirty at Traeger Park?

Mr BONSON: Oh no, sorry, for each individual – sorry, I understand now, member for Greatorex. Each individual game. It is my understanding - and I stand to be corrected - that it is 30 per game. So 30 down at Traeger Park when we saw the West Coast Eagles versus Carlton, and what a fantastic game that turned out to be. Of course, up here now, we are going to be seeing Port play Western Bulldogs and we will see a couple of Territory boys running around in that as well, so it will be good.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. Minister, could you provide a list of, first of all, how many people will be entertained in the government corporate box or corporate hospitality for the upcoming Bulldogs fixture? Are you able, or prepared to provide a list of invitees?

Mr BONSON: In terms of individual invitees and their names, as you respect and no doubt other members of the committee would respect, the individual's names are ...

Mr CONLAN: They are invited by the Northern Territory government.

Mr BONSON: Yes. I do not feel comfortable with giving out the individuals' names.

Mr CONLAN: I think the Territory might be concerned if you invited Ivan Milat to a corporate hospitality venue. We would like to know just ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am guessing, but I do not think we have!

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman, I hope not.

Mr BONSON: I can assure you that Ivan Milat has not been invited. I can assure you that we take it quite seriously.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, as this is a government-provided corporate hospitality tent, are you able to provide the list of the people you have invited?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, I will give you details of numbers. I will defer to Mr Rossingh and then, after Mr Rossingh has completed, I will provide you with the answer to second part of your question.

Mr CONLAN: The actual invitees?

Mr BONSON: No, sorry, member for Greatorex. I will ask Mr Rossingh, Executive Director, to clarify the numbers of the AFL matches. I am pretty confident it is 30 reserved grandstand seats for matches at TIO Stadium and Traeger Park, and one full use of the corporate box. I will ask for that advice. Regarding names, I will answer that after the Executive Director provides any further information, if appropriate.

Mr ROSSINGH: Just reiterating that, for AFL matches, the agreement with the AFL requires 30 reserved grandstand seats for all matches at TIO Stadium, as well as 30 reserved grandstand seats for matches at Traeger Park, and also full use of one corporate box. My understanding is that would accommodate eight people.

At ARL matches, it is one corporate facility for eight people. For National Basketball League matches, which will involve the Perth Wildcats, one corporate box facility for eight people. For Crusty Demons, one corporate box facility for 16 people. They are the obligations under the agreements with the sporting bodies.

Mr CONLAN: Are you able to provide how much this cost for the corporate facilities?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, as you may be aware, the agreements that we sign for these magnificent events stipulate an allotment of tickets for the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I am not aware if we do have a figure on it, but I defer to the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: Certainly, for the corporate boxes, those boxes are to be provided excluding food and beverage. There is no food and beverage provided; it is just the seat in there. If there is food and beverages, then they have to be purchased. I do not think there is a standard - well, sorry, I will rephrase that. I am sure there is a standard cost for corporate boxes; it varies by promoter and by event. I am sure we can provide that information to you.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you. The game you have mentioned, minister, in Alice Springs with Carlton and the West Coast Eagles, would you be able to provide a list of invitees for the government function there, and how much that event cost?

Mr BONSON: I feel comfortable, member for Greatorex, to provide numbers and the cost, and that is appropriate. However, I feel very uncomfortable in releasing people's names, through no fault of their own ...

Mr CONLAN: Are Labor Party members?

Ms CARNEY: Get an invitation from you?

Mr CONLAN: Sorry, Mr Chairman. Minister, you can surely understand the concern. Can I just tell you what your predecessor said when explaining why taxpayers foot the bill for free tickets to sporting events:

If we buy tickets in our office, the tickets are going to business leaders, people we actually want to accommodate because, at the end, we probably want something from them.

That is what your predecessor said, minister. So, you can see with that, there is, obviously, something that the Northern Territory government want from the people who they are handing out these free tickets to. We would like to know who they are and what exactly is it you want from them?

Mr BONSON: Member for Greatorex, in terms of comments by previous Sports ministers, I think it is appropriate that they deal with it. All I can assure you is, in my position as Sports minister, the last event that we gave tickets out, for instance, in Alice Springs, the Carlton and West Coast Eagles game, I went to the hospital and met young children, whom I do not want to name for appropriate reasons, who never had an opportunity, possibly, to go to these games. We gave them tickets, we gave their parents tickets. We accommodated people who were ill, and gave them the opportunity to see a beautiful footy match between Carlton and West Coast Eagles at the magnificent facility in Traeger Park in the multi-million dollar grandstand. I feel uncomfortable with even broaching the issue about naming people in those circumstances.

Mr CONLAN: All right, minister. What checks and balances are in place to acquit these tickets when they have been given away?

Mr BONSON: The tickets come usually as part of an agreement with any of these sporting bodies. It comes as an allotment to me as Minister for Sport and Recreation. I cannot speak for other Sports ministers, both for this government or previous governments, but I took the opportunity in my role to hand out tickets to kids in hospitals. One individual in particular, and without going into too much detail to identify him, is suffering from a terminal illness, and was a mad supporter of the Western Bulldogs. He had the opportunity to come. I arranged through my contacts, not only through minister for Sport but as just a person who has a love for Australian Rules football, the opportunity to go into the change rooms. When his mother came up to me and said thanks very much, it is not one of those things that you, in this position, use for any type of benefit; you get a satisfaction as a human being out of it.

Mr CONLAN: Can I just ask you that question again, minister. Regardless of that, what checks and balances are in place to acquit these tickets once they have been given away by the Northern Territory government?

Mr BONSON: I understand your question, and all I can do is assure you that I have taken an opportunity in this role, in this position, to allot tickets to people who are recognised as individuals who would have an interest in these sporting events, or are disadvantaged or deserving - for want of a better way to describe it - the opportunity to enter these games. A throwaway comment was made about membership of this and membership of that. These people are young kids. I do not really have much more to add to that.

Mr CONLAN: All right. Mr Chairman, that will do for this output for me. I have a few non-specific output questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: Just a couple of things, Mr Chairman. Minister, the basketball stadium at Alice Springs would need upgrading, particularly with the Masters Games coming up. Has the town council or the basketball association made any approach to you for assistance to upgrade that stadium?

Mr BONSON: A very good question, member for Braitling. I defer to the Executive Director of Sport and Recreation, Mr Rossingh.

Mr ROSSINGH: No requests for funding or any assistance have been received in recent times that I can recall. However, it is certainly an issue that the Sports Facility Advisory Committee of the Alice Springs Town Council is working through as one of its priorities. I know it was identified as an issue, probably in the middle of last year, but it has not emerged from that committee as one of the high priorities, so we have not received anything formal or informal.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, if it was raised with you, being an ex-basketball player, do you think you could assist in any way?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, you have me over a bit of a barrel here. I am going to the Masters Games this year ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Playing basketball?

Mr BONSON: I will be playing basketball, so, no doubt, I will inquire, on your behalf, the issues that are surrounding basketball down there. It is appropriate, as clearly identified by the Executive Director, that we look at the working group and see what their priorities are. I know you are a genuine advocate for people in Central Australia. I defer to Dr Ritchie if he has anything further to add.

Also, member for Braitling, one of the initiatives the government has put in, is the \$1m to facilities. I encourage not only the basketball community in Alice Springs, but other representative bodies all over the Northern Territory to make use of that. That is a process that will be vetted and prioritised. If they come within the priorities down in Central Australia then, no doubt, I will assist in those facilities being upgraded.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, obviously, football is another one of your passions. There has been a lot of talk with *Closing the Gap* of making sure there are grassed facilities, ovals, on communities. Do you have a program of assisting communities to have the grassed ovals, or is it part of the agenda?

Mr BONSON: Very good question, member for Braitling. As you, other members on the committee, and all parliamentarians know, for many people in remote areas sport and recreation is the lifeblood of their community. Central Australia does a fantastic job in the football competition which brings everyone in. I have had different people advocate on their behalf the need to provide football on communities and the infrastructure there. We invite people to make a submission in terms of the facilities grants. We also have partnerships and I will let the Executive Director, Mr Rossingh or Dr Ritchie outline some of the tasks we are doing out bush.

Dr RITCHIE: While there is not a substantial budget line here to do with this, the department as a whole and through local government reform, and having had discussions with the, for instance; the West MacDonnell Shire, it is going to be one of their first priorities, to provide grassed playing areas in remote communities. We are supporting that through local government reform.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, do you have any plans to provide recreational halls in some of those communities that have requested them?

Mr BONSON: That is a very genuine question. One of the major issues facing all of us is dealing with a many of those facility issues, but I will let Dr Ritchie add anything if he wants to.

Dr RITCHIE: There is no program for halls. As you have gathered, the substantial direction of the funding through this grants program is to people, rather than to infrastructure.

Mrs BRAHAM: I would suggest, minister, that you would be highly supportive of any approach made by communities in that way. Mr Chairman, that is it.

Ms CARNEY: I have a question, Mr Chairman. Hello, minister; hello departmental representatives. Minister, I wonder if I could return to the question of tickets. You said that you gave a ticket to some kids and one really crook kid in Alice Springs. Good on you. You received publicity for that, did you not?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, I did help promote the AFL match there and I can assure you that there was no intention for me to make promotions out of that ticket sale. What we saw were young people who were crook going to the football match, and they were happy to enjoy that football match.

Ms CARNEY: And use the resources of your office, in terms of your staff, to arrange, not only for media I think, to be present at the hospital to take a photograph to do the article. Did you seek publicity in relation to other tickets you gave away - picture in the paper, that sort of thing?

Mr BONSON: In terms of all the tickets at all the different events, we do a number of different things. Some of them are to work out who are the disadvantaged individuals, whether they are young or old, in the community who are deserving of getting a ticket, or might not have an opportunity. Others are interest groups. One of the interest groups was for the Crusty Demons. We went out to a motor sport group and

handed out some tickets. As part of the promotion of what NT government does in supporting these events, we encourage people to go because, if they do not go to these events, then they are not sustainable. Of course, as you would know, member for Araluen, we do give an enticement for these groups to come.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps I was not specific enough, and I will ask it slightly differently. Let us stick to the Alice Springs one. You got your picture in the paper because you gave some tickets to the kids. You did not get your picture in the paper when you gave it to the adults. As we know, children do not vote, children do not donate to political parties, and I do not know about your side of politics, but mine generally does not regard children as opinion makers. How many tickets in relation to the match in Alice Springs did you give to grown-ups?

Mr BONSON: The total amount, off the top of my head again, the figures were – sorry I have the piece of paper in front of me now - was 30 grandstand tickets and one full use of the corporate box.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could you speak up?

Mr BONSON: Thirty reserved grandstand seats, and one full use of the corporate box.

Ms CARNEY: And 16 in the corporate box? Or was that just for ...

Mr BONSON: That number I do not ...

Ms CARNEY: The corporate box in Alice was huge, was it not? I think.

Mr BONSON: Well, it was a lot of people.

Ms CARNEY: How many in the corporate box did you give tickets to?

Mr BONSON: There were a lot of people in the Mona's Bar and I will get those figures if we have them.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, we will have those numbers?

Mr BONSON: In terms of the kids ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, minister. Sorry, I do not mean to be rude but can I stop you there.

Mr BONSON: Regarding that question you asked about how many the grown-ups, I am sure we might have had a list. For instance, when we went to the hospital we gave it to the kids, and we gave it to two of their parents. Yes, we gave one or two to the kids who might have been involved; a sibling, etcetera, but we also, of course, gave it to the parents to attend - one of which were Carlton supporters so they enjoyed that. The other was a nurse from my recollection.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, I am talking about the other people. Just remove yourself from the hospital; it was obviously memorable because, from memory, that is where you had the photo. Let us talk about the other grown-ups. Can you answer the question: how many tickets did you give away to grown-ups for the corporate box in Alice Springs? Let us just get the answer to that one and then, perhaps, we can move on to some others.

Mr BONSON: On the figures I have, I do not know.

Ms CARNEY: You do not know? Okay. Do you have any idea of the cost of those tickets that you gave away to the grown-ups for the corporate box at the footy match in Alice Springs?

Mr BONSON: As you would know, member for Araluen, as part of the committee, we have given an undertaking to find out what the costs would be in the agreement. We do not have that figure here. We will provide that information to the committee on both AFL matches at Traeger Park, TIO Stadium, ARL matches, NBL matches and Crusty Demons. We have taken it on notice.

Ms CARNEY: I appreciate that. You may have misunderstood me, so I will ask again: in relation to the corporate box - the big one in the grandstand that is not quite finished - how many tickets did you give to adults?

Mr BONSON: Thank you for the question, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: I am grateful for an answer, minister.

Mr BONSON: Of course, you would be ...

Ms CARNEY: If I am lucky.

Mr BONSON: If you allow me to provide the answer, I will. My understanding is that we are provided tickets to each AFL match that we have. The advice that I have been given is that we get 30 reserve grandstand seats for all matches at TIO Stadium and Traeger Park, and one full use of a corporate box. The use of that was in Mona's Bar, and there were people I invited - boys, girls, adult men and women; and I do not have the exact number. We have on notice that we are going to give you the cost. I feel uncomfortable releasing names, but that is where we got.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, well, in the words of a young friend of mine - easy cowboy, because I have not got to the names yet. My colleague asked you that. I have not made a decision yet as to whether I will ask you. So, let us just stay on track. See if I have this right: 30 tickets for the corporate box at that footy match between West Coast and Carlton in Alice Springs provided under the agreement with the AFL. Correct? Am I right?

Mr BONSON: Correct.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many tickets did your office purchase over and above those 30?

Mr BONSON: My understanding is that we have not, as an office, purchased any tickets. I stand to be corrected if that is the case, but it is my advice that we have not. The tickets that we had were all in-kind and it was in regard to the agreement that we had. We make no apologies for giving it to worthwhile people who are part of the community. We do not back away from that.

Ms CARNEY: When you say you would stand to be corrected, is this, with respect, an opportune time for you to just check? I really do not mean to be rude, but you are leaving the door open, in a sense. Do you want to make certain that you only had the 30 tickets - that we are only talking about the 30 tickets?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, I will take advice on that. I can assure you that I am aware of what your line of questioning is getting to and ...

Ms CARNEY: All right. So, you are happy with that? You are okay?

Mr BONSON: Thank you for your patience, member for Araluen. I have now been informed that we did not get 30 tickets in Alice Springs, we had 10.

Ms CARNEY: You had 10 under the agreement with the AFL?

Mr BONSON: My understanding is we got 10 under that agreement and we gave those to worthy people, some of whom were young children who were sick in hospital, and their parents.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. You gave answers earlier to my colleague, the member for Greatorex, about, as I understood it, the pretty much standard deal with the AFL. They chuck in a corporate box and 30 reserved tickets. Do I take it that the answers given to my colleague were not correct either?

Mr BONSON: My advice is that the information that I have given you here is correct.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, which information? The one you have provided before or your most recent one?

Mr BONSON: The information that tickets that we get from these sporting events are part of agreements that we make with them, that we provide incentive for them to come. As part of that agreement, we get a stipulated allotments of tickets and, as Minister for Sport and Recreation, I decide on where those tickets will go. I make ...

Ms CARNEY: You have not answered the question. Do you get 10 or 30?

Mr BONSON: Can I get to it, if I can, Madam Deputy Chair? Just for clarification sake, if I am allowed to. So, those events are the AFL matches, NRL matches, NBL matches and Crusty Demons. I have now been advised that the total amount in Traeger Park was 10.

Member for Araluen, I have been advised again, that the original advice that I gave you was correct, that there were 30 reserved grandstand seats, and that there were 10 corporate box seats. So, that is all I can say, is that my original advice was correct and my apologies for any misrepresentation.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. Let me see if I have this right. I think it would be easier for both of us; let us just stay focused on the AFL footy game in Alice Springs. You got, as part of that deal, 30 tickets, plus a corporate box that had, what, 10 or 16?

Mr BONSON: Ten.

Ms CARNEY: In the corporate box 10 – so, 30 plus 10. In an answer you gave to me several minutes ago, when I asked did your office buy any tickets, you said no. Do I have that correct?

Mr BONSON: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. What about the Office of Central Australia? How many tickets did they buy?

Mr BONSON: I am not sure, Mr Chairman, that this comes out in the output group, but I would ask advice from Dr Ritchie.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is certainly open to say the Office of Central Australia is not the agency, so you have no idea. That is what I would have thought.

Ms CARNEY: For the record, minister, put it on the record.

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: We have no records in this agency of tickets bought by the Office of Central Australia to that event.

Ms CARNEY: Of course, through you, minister, you would not, with respect, Mr Ritchie, because you are in the department. I am talking about the ministerial offices, and the Office of Central Australia, as you know, is not part of your department. The minister said before his office did not provide tickets. Perhaps, I will ask it this way. Minister, do you know whether the Office of Central Australia bought tickets?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen for your question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I just clarify: are you talking in his role as minister for Sport, if he is aware of that office?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, well I can say that the Office of Central Australia; which has actually been re-badged as the Office of the Department of the Chief Minister has, on the signage, Hon Matthew Bonson, the minister for Sport. So, clearly, this comes under the minister for Sport.

Mr BONSON: I thank the member for Greatorex for his clarification when he appropriately described the Office of Central Australia as the portfolio of the Chief Minister, and ...

Mr CONLAN: No, not portfolio, department.

Mr BONSON: ... questions in regard to the purchase of tickets by that office, should have appropriately been asked of the Chief Minister. Under my portfolio responsibilities, I am unable to inform the committee of the amount of, if any, tickets that they purchased.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, come on, minister, you are the minister for Sport. You have been telling everyone how wonderful the footy is. The office down there bought tickets and you gave them away to lots of people, did you not?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, as you would be aware, we do many things to bring sporting events to Alice Springs, Darwin, and other places in the Northern Territory. We are unashamed at that fact. We understand it is important to the social fabric of all our communities. The reality is that my advice is - and I can only stand on this advice - that we were provided with 30 reserve grandstand seats and 10 seats in the corporate area of Mona's Bar. I enjoyed the footy. I understand what the line of questioning is, and it is a

perfectly legitimate line of questioning. However, all I can say, member for Araluen, is that I do not feel uncomfortable about the answers I have provided to you.

Ms CARNEY: Well, you did not feel uncomfortable when you said 30, then 10, then 30. Clearly, you are not going to answer this. I will just put it to you that there were scores of people in the corporate box who went there at the invitation of government. You being a member of that government – in fact, your name might have even been on an invitation. So, when you say to this committee, 'Oh, we just helped little kiddies', it is disingenuous and politically cynical, with respect, for you to give those answers, when you know damn well that you gave lots of tickets to pretty much all and sundry so that you and your staff could ingratiate yourselves - to the extent that that is possible - to many people in Alice Springs. You would agree with that, would you not?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen. I do not agree with that. My responsibility as Minister for Sport and Recreation is to try to deliver the best bang for the Northern Territory buck that we can deliver. One of the ways we do it is trying to bring these iconic events to the Northern Territory. We are unashamed about that.

Ms CARNEY: No, you do not have much shame. That is right.

Mr BONSON: In terms of what I can talk about in my portfolio responsibility and my knowledge, we had 10 tickets in the Mona's Bar corporate area and we had 30 in the reserved grandstand seats. There was a mixture of people involved - some adults, some kids. Some were from what we would call disadvantaged groups, some people were sick. I do not want to get into an argument about this with you, and I am sure you really do not want to. Let us leave it at that.

Ms CARNEY: It is very tempting to say okay. However - and I know there are other things to get through, but I just feel it is important for this committee, which scrutinises the budget, which is money spent, for us to get some details on that. You say proudly and repeatedly that you give away tickets to children and grown-ups, yet, you say you feel uncomfortable providing their names. Remember, it is not your money and, given there might be a public perception in the absence or your provision of names, that you might be giving them to your mates or strong Labor Party supporters, or perhaps people in the middle whose votes you are trying to get. You would understand that some people might hold that view – yes?

Mr BONSON: Just to clarify again how these tickets come to be my responsibility to give away. The Northern Territory government enters into agreements with national and international bodies and Territory bodies to deliver certain events.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I know. You have said that, minister.

Mr BONSON: Out of these events, we get allotments of tickets. We do not purchase those tickets. So, we do not spend money to the tickets. We spend money to get the event, and as a by-product of that, we get an allotment of tickets as part of the agreement. I do not feel uncomfortable about the fact that we give tickets away to people in the community that we would argue would be disadvantaged or groups who would not have the opportunity to go. You have described it the way you want to describe it, and I am describing it the way I want to describe it.

Ms CARNEY: You can argue that, because only you and your office have the names. Why should we believe you? You say that you give them to deserving people. In an age where people are increasingly cynical about governments, government ministers, it might be wise for you to release those names, because the inference is that you will decide how you spend taxpayers' money, and we need to trust you. I do not trust you on that score and, with taxpayers' money, Territorians' money, I think it is extraordinary, frankly, that you will not provide the names. But, we will leave it there; we understand each other. You are feeling comfortable. I am feeling very uncomfortable that you feel so comfortable about doing what you do with other people's money. But, we will leave it there.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen, for that statement.

Ms CARNEY: It is a pleasure.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are on Output 4.3 still. Member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: No, I think I asked what I wanted.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions on Output 4.3, that concludes consideration on Output Group 4.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions? Member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Just a couple. How many Sports and Recreation staff are in Sports House at the moment, as of 2008?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: The number of staff in Sports House at the moment is 14.

Mr CONLAN: Fourteen, yes, sorry, and you did provide that before, beg your pardon. How many Sport and Recreation staff were in Sports House in 2001?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: We are unable to give you an exact figure. It is probably better to take that one on notice and give it to you ...

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Ritchie.

Question on Notice No 9.7

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please restate the question, member for Greatorex.

Mr CONLAN: How many Sports and Recreation staff were in Sports House in 2001?

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

Mr BONSON: I am, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 9.7.

Mr CONLAN: Would the minister know whether there has been an increase or a decrease in staff from 2001?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: It is quite likely that there is a decrease in the number of staff at Sports House, but we will determine that and provide it in our answer.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Ritchie. Minister, are you able to provide reasons why the department believes there would be a decrease in staff since 2001?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: There are a number of programs that have moved location from that building.

Mr CONLAN: Has there been a reduction in programs?

Dr RITCHIE: Not that I am aware of.

Mr CONLAN: So, programs have moved where?

Dr RITCHIE: The people undertaking the programs are now located in different buildings.

Mr CONLAN: As a result of that, has the Department of Sport and Recreation ceased any sport and recreation programs since 2001?

Mr BONSON: I thank the member of Greatorex for his question, and refer to Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, the answer is that the Department of Sport and Recreation has ceased programs that have been moved to other departments.

Mr CONLAN: Thank you, Dr Ritchie. Minister, would you be able to table a list of programs that have been reduced, ceased or moved to another department?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: I believe it is only one, and that is the Major Events, and that has gone to ...

Mr CONLAN: That is the Major Events. So the difference between the staffing in Sports House today and 2001 is a result of Major Events being shifted?

Dr RITCHIE: The Major Events answer was in relation to your question about has the department ceased any program. We ceased that program because it is moved to the Office of the Chief Minister.

Mr CONLAN: Those programs that have been moved to other departments then, minister, would you be prepared to table those?

Mr BONSON: It is my understanding that the only program that has been moved is the one that Dr Ritchie has identified. I am not really sure if it is appropriate. I will get advice if there is real need. Dr Ritchie?

Dr RITCHIE: What I am differentiating is that we are talking initially about staff numbers in Sports House. Staff numbers in Sports House, I felt, would be less today than it was in 2001 because staff have been moved from that building. They are doing some other things, so there have been two men moved from that building. Of the staff that have been moved from that building, some are the ones who have gone to Chief Minister's, in Major Events. I understand there are some other staff who are now operating from Marrara.

Mr CONLAN: All right. Allow me to be a bit broader then. How many staff are there in the actual department of Sport and Recreation compared to the number of staff in 2001? While you might not have those figures with you, would it be fair to say that there has been a reduction in staff?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: The number of staff in the division of Sport and Recreation is 69. That includes Water Safety and Animal Welfare - just wait for two seconds and I will have it.

Mr CONLAN: Okay.

Dr RITCHIE: Just in the Sport and Recreation output, the total is 48.

Mr CONLAN: While you might have the figure now, would you say that there has been a reduction in staff, or an increase in staff, since 2001?

Mr BONSON: Dr Ritchie.

Dr RITCHIE: While I was able to answer with some confidence that there had been a reduction in the staff actually operating from Sports House over that period, because I knew about the move to Chief Minister's and some relocations of staff, overall, it is better that we take that one on notice and give you an accurate number.

Mr CONLAN: Okay, thank you.

Question on Notice No 9.8

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate the question for the purposes of *Hansard*, member for Greatorex?

Mr CONLAN: That would be are you able to table the staff numbers for Sport and Recreation for 2001 to 2008?

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

Mr BONSON: Sorry, I just want to clarify with the member for Greatorex. Are we referring to Sports House or the total number in ...

Mr CONLAN: As Dr Ritchie suggested before, the total number was 48. Where that figure came from, that is the figure that I am looking for.

Mr BONSON: And you are looking at the total number now? The total number between 2001 and 2008 of the whole department? Is that correct?

Mr CONLAN: No, the number from that 48. There are 48 now - how many there were in 2001?

Mr BONSON: Okay, mate. I am genuine. Could you just clarify that again? I am sorry, I apologise.

Mr CONLAN: From 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Mr BONSON: So could you just clarify that question again?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want that restated?

Mr BONSON: Yes, if that is all right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, if you could.

Mr CONLAN: Minister, would you table the staffing numbers in Sport and Recreation, from 2001 to 2008?

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

Mr BONSON: Yes, I think there is actually a complication here. Dr Ritchie would just like to clarify. Sorry it is taking so long, but we just want to make sure we get it right.

Dr RITCHIE: Member for Greatorex, I have just been reminded that in 2001, Sport and Recreation was a department. So, to compare, it is not comparing apples with apples to do a head count, because the number I gave you, is 48, if you like, frontline staff. It does not include any of the time of the corporate staff, or me as Chief Executive of the department. When it was its own department, of course, it would have had its own Chief Executive and its own media staff and so, the number, I can guarantee you, would have been more than 48.

Mr CONLAN: Yes, okay.

Dr RITCHIE: But we will make that clear.

Mr CONLAN: Nevertheless, would you still be able to table that information?

Dr RITCHIE: Yes.

Mr CONLAN: Great.

Mr BONSON: So I am willing to take that on notice ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is substantially in the same form as the when previously asked?

Mr CONLAN: Yes, I think it is the same, it was clarification.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am just trying to make it clear for *Hansard*. In that case, I allocate that question No 9.8.

Mr CONLAN: Okay. That is it for me, thank you very much.

Ms CARNEY: I have a question. Are you Dr David Ritchie or Mr David Ritchie?

Dr RITCHIE: I have a Doctorate so I can be called Dr David Ritchie.

Ms CARNEY: We can call you Dr Ritchie. That is very interesting because this is a list of every departmental person who appears. Several of them have 'Dr' in front of their names; yours does not. I am sure that will be fixed next year, Dr Ritchie.

Mr CHAIRMAN: There being no further questions, on behalf of the committee, I thank all the officers who have appeared here this evening to assist the minister. We much appreciate your time and assistance through this process. We will now move on to the Department of Corporate and Information Services.

The committee suspended.

DEPARTMENT OF CORPORATE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are you all right to start, minister?

Mr BONSON: I am, thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I invite the minister to introduce the officers accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Corporate and Information Services.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I welcome to the table Mr Graham Symons, the department's Chief Executive, and Kathleen Robinson, the Deputy Secretary ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Speak up, minister.

Mr BONSON: Oh, sorry - that shy thing about me.

Ms CARNEY: Do not sing. Do not sing.

Mr BONSON: I was going to break out into Elvis then. I welcome to the table Mr Graham Symons, the Department's Chief Executive and Kathleen Robinson, the Deputy Secretary. Also, Mr Rex Schoolmeester the Chief Financial Officer. There are a number of other DCIS officers present, and I will call on them as required.

Mr Chairman, the Department of Corporate and Information Services was established in 1998 as the shared corporate service provider for the Northern Territory government agencies. I acknowledge the initiative of previous CLP governments in this regard. At that time, DCIS was the first whole-of-government shared services provider in Australia. Since then, several other jurisdictions have followed the Northern Territory's lead. DCIS, together with the associated business divisions, continues to be a leader in the public sector's shared service provisions in Australia.

DCIS is focused on the provision of efficient, effective, behind-the-scenes support to the rest of the public service, leaving these agencies to concentrate on delivering frontline services such as health, education, policing, and infrastructure. Shared services provided by DCIS include finance, human resources, contract tendering, information and communication technology, property leasing, and records management. DCIS also manages three government businesses divisions, namely, NT Fleet, Data Centre Services and the Government Printing Office.

Over the past year, DCIS has managed its activities efficiently and within budget. The department has managed to absorb an increasing corporate support workload within its existing budget. DCIS is currently managing a number of initiatives focused on standardising whole-of-government corporate services, procedures and processes; improving internal controls across agencies; reducing double data entry, manual handling and opportunity for error; improving the tracking of transactions; improving service to reliability; and reducing Corporate Services' costs. These initiatives, when completed, will address the

concern about internal controls in government agencies expressed by the Auditor-General in his report to the Legislative Assembly in August last year.

In addition to its shared services role, DCIS is also responsible for policy development for procurement and for information, communication and technology, and contributes to policy development in other areas including property leasing and management. The information, communications and technology policy portfolio reports to the Chief Minister. Mr Chairman, I look forward to the committee's questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Ms CARNEY: No thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you talked about the services of Corporate Services, DCIS. Recently, I think there was another review you mentioned. In Alice Springs, in particular, I believe there was a shifting of many of the positions. Could you give me some indication of how many positions were lost to Alice Springs and what functions are still left in Alice Springs?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, this is the Corporate Services review and I defer to Mr Symons, the Chief Executive.

Mr SYMONS: Graham Symons, Chief Executive. Member for Braitling, the Corporate Services review is the review you are referring to. It actually started a couple of years ago. It aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of corporate services across the NTPS, but most of the impact is in DCIS. We have instituted a number of reviews, but specific consultancies as part of that review. What we were doing was benchmarking ourselves against other shared services providers across the country - public sector and private sector. I guess the overall finding was that productivity in our processing areas was less than we might have expected it should be. That was no reflection on DCIS staff, but it did reflect, I guess, some of our business processes and some of the systems that we had inherited.

The major findings of the review were that we should look at standardising business processes and systems across the service, and the processes that begin in agencies and end in DCIS, and that we should be making some investment in systems, particularly IT automation. One of the other findings was that one of the factors in the relatively lower levels of productivity in the processing areas - and I am referring to areas like payroll, accounts payable, accounts receivable - was because we had actually spread those processing functions geography across five locations or more in the Territory. That is the background to it.

The decisions that have been taken as a result of that was the particular impacts on staff in Alice Springs that you were referring to which is actually a co-location of processing functions. There are three main processing functions that we perform in DCIS; there is payroll, accounts receivable and accounts payable. What we have done is move to co-locate all the accounts receivable functions NT-wide in Alice Springs, and to co-locate the other two processing functions in Darwin. We are proceeding with that. That has commenced at the moment.

Overall, across the Corporate Services review over the next few years, the biggest impact is we are reducing some staff numbers. I guess that is because, basically, we are a backroom support function, and it is a matter of freeing up resources for frontline services to the community, as the minister mentioned earlier. We are reducing positions overall over the next few years. The biggest reduction is in Darwin, but there is also a smaller reduction, in the regions. In Alice Springs ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you tell us what those reductions are in the regions?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: The actual people reductions are almost negligible. That is because we have actually been carrying some vacancies for some time, particularly in Alice Springs where it has been quite difficult to fill some of the payroll positions. The actual people reduction in Alice Springs is zero, but that does involve about 15 positions that we will not continue to attempt to fill. Tennant Creek, the reduction is three; Nhulunbuy, the reduction is two; Katherine, the people reduction is zero, but there are a couple of positions involved.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, have any staff lost their jobs across the Territory because of the relocation or anything like that?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, it is my understanding that there have been no public servants losing their jobs. There have been options provided to them, and I defer to Chief Executive, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Member for Braitling, do you want me to deal with it location by location?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, if you have it.

Mr SYMONS: Darwin: a total of 36 staff whose positions have been affected by the changes at this stage - nobody has lost their jobs. I should say the overall process we adopted here with staff was to identify any position that was affected. Those staff were advised face-to-face of what the changes were and what the impact was. They were then asked to give preferences of relocation. The undertaking was that no permanent staff would lose jobs; no staff on temporary contracts that have been with us for six months or more would lose their jobs. We, in fact, undertook to make them permanent, and we said we would endeavour to keep employing any staff on temporary contracts where that was possible.

What we also undertook was that, if any person had been on higher duties for 18 months or more, and their job was affected, we would make them permanent at the higher level, and that is what we have done. Darwin has 36 staff who were affected, and no staff have lost their jobs. We have actually placed all of those staff in a permanent position at level except for one who is currently unattached, but we are quite confident we will place her internally as soon as a vacancy comes up. There were four staff on long-term higher duties who have been made permanent at that level.

Alice Springs has 32 staff. Their positions were affected by the changes. Again, two staff have opted to transfer to Darwin; most of the staff with the payroll function because that suited their family circumstances. Just about all the other staff we have transferred at level internally within DCIS. One has opted to take a transfer to another agency at level. There are three people who are actually due to retire before the end of the year so, obviously, we have not pursued permanent placements for them. There are four staff in Alice Springs on temporary contracts. We have not provided them with permanent positions at this time, but we expect to be able to continue to employ them if they wish to stay with us.

Tennant Creek has five staff affected by the changes. We will only end up with two customer services positions in Tennant Creek. They will be at the interface with the rest of the services, but we will not do processing there. Those two people have been selected. One person in Tennant Creek is transferring to another agency within Tennant Creek. We expect another person to do so, but we have not, at this point, located a position at level, but we expect to be able to. One person is planning retirement. She is actually 67, so she is taking leave and then retiring.

In Katherine there is one person who has been directly affected. She is transferring to a permanent position in Darwin. There is one person on temporary contract. We expect to be able to continue to place that person, but we do not have a permanent position at this point.

In Nhulunbuy, there are five staff affected. We are going to end up with two positions there. They have been selected. Two other people are on temporary placements in other agencies pending permanent vacancies arising. We have placed them in agencies where vacancies are expected. One person who is studying nursing part-time has taken 12 months leave without pay to complete nursing and she will move to Health.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, are these positions part of the review that occurred a couple of years ago when we had a lot of very unhappy people who were being affected by these changes, or has this just happened within the last six to 12 months?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, the history of DCIS is that it is an area where government works towards minimising backroom costing to the public service. It has been going on since 1998. In terms of the corporate review, I defer to the CEO, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: I suspect the changes you are referring to was a move of some payroll functions in 2006.

Mrs BRAHAM: Payroll, yes.

Mr SYMONS: No, this is quite separate exercise. In fact, the decisions associated with this were only taken in April this year and we advised staff on 1 May.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are there any payroll positions left in Alice Springs?

Mr SYMONS: There will be none. They will all be transferring to Darwin, but we are transferring all the accounts receivable function to Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Accounts receivable – what does that refer to?

Mr SYMONS: Okay. If I can just distinguish – accounts payable is where we are paying suppliers to departments. Accounts receivable is where we are receiving payments to government.

Mrs BRAHAM: From?

Mr SYMONS: They may be individuals, they may be companies. They are people who are paying government for some kind of service.

Mrs BRAHAM: So that would not be a very large component. You do not have many staff who do that?

Mr SYMONS: The total staff in accounts receivable is currently just over 30.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many?

Mr SYMONS: Just over 30.

Mrs BRAHAM: All in Alice Springs?

Mr SYMONS: They will be in Alice Springs, yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, so that offsets those who have had to transfer.

Mr SYMONS: Yes. As I said, people-wise there is a zero impact. If you like, there will be no fewer people in Alice Springs, but we were carrying a number of vacancies down there. We will not continue to attempt to fill those.

Mrs BRAHAM: Where will they be located? Will they still be located in the Alice Plaza?

Mr SYMONS: Yes, member for Braitling. We are actually shrinking space-wise, and that is partly to assist other agencies which are requiring additional space. We had a bit more than we needed and some of the space that we were occupying in Alice Springs, in fact, has been temporarily occupied by the shires. I think, then, it will be ultimately occupied by DEET, if I am correct. But yes, we will still be in the same place.

Mr BONSON: We have made a concerted effort to ensure that anyone affected by the Corporate Services review are given real options. As you have heard, we have been able to work through all these issues.

Mrs BRAHAM: Has the function of payroll, with the move to Darwin, been efficient, or have people experienced delays in receiving their salaries? I only say that because I know that some of them are quite complex. They have to send in their time sheets and they are not done in time and what have you.

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: We have one batch of payroll still to transfer, but most of them have actually transferred in the last few weeks. I am not aware of any difficulties. The payroll ...

Mrs BRAHAM interjecting.

Mr SYMONS: That is right. The payroll function is something you can actually perform at a distance. However, we have created two additional customer services positions in Alice Springs, and they will be largely involved as an interface with staff in Alice Springs on payroll matters. That is what they will be spending most of their time on.

Mrs BRAHAM: You might recall, minister, that one of the difficulties we were experiencing was teaching assistants from remote communities who had to put in time sheets, and there was concern that

they were not being processed. I am interested to know whether that problem has been overcome, or if it is still there with the system in Darwin?

Mr SYMONS: I will just seek advice from Mr Lowe. The Education payroll moved a while ago, and that problem has been overcome in any case. As I understand, there has not been any continuation of that difficulty.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you. Thank you, minister.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – CORPORATE SERVICES

Output 1.1 - Financial Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008, as they relate to the Department of Corporate and Information Services. I now call for questions relating to Output Group 1.0, Corporate Services; Output 1.1, Financial Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Thanks, Mr Chairman. Good evening, everyone. Sorry we kept you waiting so late. Can I say at the outset, that if you have material, as you invariably will, that can be tabled, in the interests of time, can you table it? That will be in everyone's interests.

Minister, are you aware if any departments do their work in relation to financial services? If they do, which departments are they and what work do they do?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Yes. Virtually all departments would be performing some financial services functions. The functions that were transferred to DCIS, which we provide a shared service of providers, are mainly the processing functions in finance. All agencies would, for example, have people in the budgets area who would, basically, be developing and tracking budgets. There are some agencies who have a few other staff that are associated with the processing functions that we perform; for example, in accounts payable. We are certainly hopeful that some of the system and process improvements that we will be making over the next couple of years will actually free those resources up in those agencies.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Nothing else in that output.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any questions? That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Human Resource Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 1.2, Human Resource Services. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, I think you have about \$4m less and 20 fewer staff in this year's budget compared to the last one. Is that due to other departments sourcing corporate services in-house, or from external providers rather than going to DCIS?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Can I just clarify - are you referring to staff in Human Resources, or are you referring to staff in the Corporate Services output group as a whole?

Ms CARNEY: Can you answer for both?

Mr SYMONS: Yes. I believe we can provide the answers for both.

Mr BONSON: Can I just clarify the question, member for Araluen? Are you saying, and I think you said, there was a minus of \$4m - is that what you asked?

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr BONSON: Are you referring to the budget paper? I will just clarify that because it might suit you if Mr Symons can talk to the Human Resources line item.

Mr SYMONS: Human Resources has not actually gone down; they have actually increased by about \$0.5m. In Corporate Services overall, again, there is actually an increase of about \$1m overall.

Ms CARNEY: But, total, there is a reduction of \$2m? Budget 2008-09 is \$106.291m. Budget 2007-08 was \$104.771m. So there has been an overall reduction of \$2m?

Mr SYMONS: Actually, an increase.

Ms CARNEY: I am so sorry, it is late at night - which is why we should not do this late at night.

Mr BONSON: That is fair enough. I agree with you, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Well, you would. There are 20 fewer staff, or about that many? Right?

Mr SYMONS: Yes. I will pass that down the line to Deputy Secretary, Kathleen Robinson. These are estimates, and I think you are probably comparing the estimate - are you? - figure in the budget in 2007-08 with the figure in the budget with 2008-09?

Ms CARNEY: No, I am comparing 2007-08 Budget.

Mr SYMONS: Okay the final estimate. I will pass that to Kathleen Robinson.

Ms ROBINSON: Kathleen Robinson, Deputy Chief Executive. The major component of that reduction was that we transferred the Archive Service across to the department of Natural Resources during the year, and that had 13 to 14 FTEs.

Ms CARNEY: So, it has nothing to do with departments sourcing Corporate Services in-house or from external providers, rather than going to DCIS? That does not account ...

Ms ROBINSON: No, they are our own measures.

Ms CARNEY: Next question. How many DCIS staff are dedicated to each output group? How does it compare to last year? Is it possible to break it down by seniority? If you have it in table form, can you table it?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: We have details of staffing by level, which we can table if you like ...

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr SYMONS: They actually show, I think, 2007-08 up to the current staffing. We will table that if you are happy with that.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, can you table that, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: The department pays 17 700 public servants or thereabouts? Correct?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons, can you confirm that one?

Ms CARNEY: You do not know that one, minister - how many public servants we have?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: It is pretty close to that. I think the estimate in the budget is about 17 900.

Ms CARNEY: The reason I ask is that I think the Commissioner for Public Employment has a different number; that is, about 16 152. Can you explain why there is that difference?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, this difference in the figures is twofold. What we record is the actual number of people paid, so that includes a lot of part-time people, for example. That is one of the reasons why the number is significantly greater. The other reason is that most members of boards are also paid through the pay system; so they are also included in those figures, whereas the figures you would be getting from the Public Service Commissioner would be full-time equivalents and public servants only.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Do you project having to pay more public servants next year? I think, from memory, that is the case?

Mr SYMONS: Yes, that is the case.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. I understood that the former Treasurer undertook - otherwise he would go he - to reduce the size of the public service. So, what is happening?

Mr BONSON: As you would know, member for Araluen, often these matters are complex. The reality is that the former Treasurer had a view of what Treasury has to do. We, as a government, understand that our population is growing, the needs of the community are greater and, often, one of the key components of delivering services, no matter what they are, come from the Northern Territory Public Service. In regard to detail, I defer to Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, there are a couple of reasons for the increase. One of the reasons for the increase in the number of people we are paying is the Darwin Port Corporation have now come on to the general pay system. They were previously being paid on their own separate pay system. That accounts for 75 increase. The other increase is very largely confined to Health and Community Services, which is the largest one. Education is the second largest, and Local Government, Housing and Sport, and Police are the others. Some of those increases are particularly associated with the funding that followed the Commonwealth intervention, but also the NT *Closing the Gap* commitment. That accounts for the largest number of increases in people being paid.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, nothing else for that output.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Does DCIS pay for contracts right across all agencies?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Can I just clarify, member for Braitling, you are talking about people on short-term contracts employed by the public service, or are you talking about ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry, I will rephrase the question. I am thinking about contracts that are let by government agencies out to other contractors. Do all those payments go through DCIS?

Mr BONSON: Just further clarification, outside of the public service or internally, or both?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, outside the public service.

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, member for Braitling, it actually comes under Output 1.3, Procurement. DCIS is responsible for procurement policy, and we also coordinate the whole tendering process. The payments are actually made through the accounts payable system on behalf of agencies. So, the costs ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you charge the agency a fee for that collection?

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is only a couple of questions, member for Braitling?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes.

Mr SYMONS: There is a figure that appears in agencies' budgets which covers DCIS charges, which is a notional charge, except for GBDs, which pay real money. But, yes, there is a price list for different DCIS services. The GBD is paid. For agencies, the costs associated with that are reflected in their budgets, but they do not actually pay us cash.

Mrs BRAHAM: Where would I find that in the budget figures?

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Under each agency, there is a figure that reflects the DCIS charges.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does your agency have a total figure?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, if I understand it, the line of questioning is really under Output 1.3.

Mr SYMONS: Now I understand the question. No, it is a cross-agency question, but it certainly covers Outputs 1.1 and 1.2. Just an example, member for Braitling, if you look at the Operating Statement, Budget Paper No 3, for any one of those agencies, under Income. If you go to page 245, Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, you will see under Income - and this is notional, no cash actually changes hands here. Goods and services received free of charge \$5.944m and, then, you will see another figure under Expenses, about six lines down, DCIS services free of charge, \$5.944m. It shows in the budget papers for each agency as income as services received free of charge and, then, the expense.

Mrs BRAHAM: I like the term free of charge. I see where it is now. Thank you. Mr Chairman, do you want me to stop now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you are finished, member for Braitling. Are you done?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, I am done. I could go on, but I will not.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Procurement Policy and Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions for Output 1.3, Procurement Policy and Services. Any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, how many complaints did you receive in 2007-08 to date from business, and how many have been satisfactorily resolved? If you have it in table form, can you table it?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen. Just to clarify, when you said complaints - complaints in terms of the procurement processes?

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: I can provide figures on appeals to the Procurement Review Board because that is the formal process.

Ms CARNEY: If you have that in table form, will it also list complaints and resolutions?

Mr SYMONS: It provides detail of the nature of the appeal; for example, I can give you an idea of the reasons people mostly put in appeals.

Ms CARNEY: With respect, I am not looking that broadly. I am looking very specifically. How many complaints did you get from business in 2007-08? How many were satisfactorily resolved? Can you list the types of complaints and resolutions?

Mr SYMONS: Just to explain, the appeals are a formal process. It is generally where a supplier does not win a tender and has some grievance in relation to that outcome; so, it is not a complaint as such. The total number in 2007-08 to date is 72. Of those, 22 were upheld and that represents 3.5% of the total tenders processed.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, did you need more information?

Mr SYMONS: No, it was what I was trying to clarify earlier. We were not quite sure whether you actually were referring to the process for the Department of Business, Economic and Regional

Development. They have Business Liaison Officers and, sometimes, they receive written or verbal complaints, and it is their job then to liaise with the rest of the public sector. The process we deal with is the formal process about the outcome of tenders.

Ms CARNEY: They are dealt with by the department, yes? The 72 complaints, or whatever, are dealt with by DCIS, correct?

Mr SYMONS: DCIS is responsible for the function of the Procurement Review Board. It is not actually DCIS as an agency. The chairman of that review board is sitting beside me, Mr Brad Irvine, who is a senior DCIS officer. It also has a number of people on it. It has Deputy Secretary from Treasury, a senior person from DBERD, etcetera. There is a range of people who are appointed to that appeal board.

Ms CARNEY: You would be aware, through you, minister, there is a view in the business community that procurement is a profession in its own right and that it should be a specialist company, for instance, that should deal with it. Is there any possibility or any work that you are looking at to get to that position so, in fact, they are not dealt with by the board which comprises public servants?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen. Yes, there are many issues to do with procurement. As we all know, it is an important role that the Territory government and other governments fill. There have been some changes in recent years, in making the whole process more transparent and minimising the number of appeals or dissatisfied tenderers.

It is important to recognise that, as part of our role, we need to stay involved. However, we also recognise we need to have a cross-section of the community that has obvious interest in this process to be on the Procurement Review Board. There is an individual on the panel at the moment who has a great corporate history and knowledge of the procurement process, and that is Mr Irvine. I defer to him.

Ms CARNEY: Can I stop you there? Thank you. You have answered my question, so I am happy with that. Minister, you would be aware of the reasonably recent Auditor-General's report which revealed that the Department of the Chief Minister was issuing contracts and the paperwork was being completed after the contract had been let? Is that normal procedure?

Mr BONSON: I defer to Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: No, that is not the normal procedure.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, if departments were breaking the rules in relation to the issue of contracts in breach of procurement guidelines, I assume that would naturally concern you? Correct?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, my question was: does it concern you, and you are the minister. Are you unable to answer that question?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, the procurement process is a process that this government takes quite seriously. There have been many issues with procurement during different governments. In 2001, I can remember, quite clearly, one of the real concerns with the process was the transparency of it. A number of ministers, including the current Chief Minister and the current Justice minister, have taken progressive steps to ensure the procurement of government contracts is as transparent as possible. We believe, at the moment, that we have a great balance of public servants and stakeholder groups who have a genuine interest in this area. For further information ...

Ms CARNEY: Point of order! That is an answer to a question, but it is not an answer I asked. I will repeat the question: if departments are breaking the rules in relation to the issue of contracts in breach of procurement guidelines, would that be of concern to you as minister?

Mrs BRAHAM: Just say yes, obviously.

Ms CARNEY: Why, for the love of God, can you not answer this question?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Araluen. It is an interesting question and the answer is, of course, as a minister to the Crown, I am concerned if rules are being broken.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Thank you for answering that question.

Mr BONSON: I can also outline the steps we are taking to educate ...

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you, minister. That is not my question. My questions are really very specific and if you can just stay with me, that would be terrific.

Mr BONSON: I appreciate that ...

Ms CARNEY: Next question, minister ...

Mr BONSON: Through the Chair, if I am allowed to answer the question.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, you have answered my question, for which I am more grateful than you will ever know. I would now like to ask another question in relation to your portfolio.

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen ...

Ms BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I think you should come back in your role.

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, if you expect me to sit here for the next ...

Ms CARNEY: It is not a licence to rabbit on. You have an obligation, minister, to answer the questions and, thankfully, you have. Mr Chairman, I would like to ask the minister another question.

Mr BONSON: Just through the Chair, if I could just respond.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister?

Mr BONSON: This process is about putting information on the table ...

Ms CARNEY: To the questions asked, minister.

Mr BONSON: I will not be answering ...

Ms CARNEY: Mr Chairman, this is just getting ludicrous.

Mr BONSON: Mr Chairman, I will not be answering in yes or no answers; I will be giving detailed information, and that is ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister is right to answer the question how he wants.

Ms CARNEY: You have answered the question. You are, with great respect, at risk of abusing the estimates process by putting on the record things that, really, I do not seek. You have answered the question. Mr Chairman, I would like to ask another question. May I move on?

Mr BONSON: I have made my point, Mr Chairman, thank you.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Let us try another one. Minister, what is your response to the Auditor-General's comments regarding procurement in relation to the Department of the Chief Minister's contracts to Sprout Creative?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, all the members of this government take the Auditor-General's reports quite seriously, and our departments act on that. I defer the question to Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: DCIS' role here is procurement policy and processing tenders. The responsibility for the particular outcome in relation to particular tenders is the responsibility of that agency - in this case, the Department of the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, can you table all files relating to Sprout Creative, for which they were awarded contracts in 2007-08 to date - including, naturally, monies paid?

Mr BONSON: It is my advice, member for Araluen, that this question should have been appropriately asked of the Chief Minister.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry? Why is that?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: The Department of the Chief Minister is the owner of those documents, not DCIS.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Minister, how have you involved yourself in this matter - that is Sprout Creative and the contracts? Have you, for instance, ordered an audit of the circumstances surrounding the issue of contracts to Sprout Creative?

Mr BONSON: I appreciate the question and the line of questioning. It is not my role to interfere in the process that the Chief Minister and his department has undertaken. That is all I have to add to that.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, given that you are, in essence, as I understand your answer, saying, 'It has nothing to do with me' and, in light of the Auditor-General's reports, are you, as minister, at all worried about issues of propriety and integrity?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, before you answer that, there is already evidence before this committee that the Auditor-General was not concerned about issues of propriety. It is only fair that the minister be informed of that because, if the Auditor-General has been satisfied and has given that evidence here, it would seem, respectfully, that the minister is not required to answer that question. The Auditor-General has covered it.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and I thank the member for Araluen for her question. We always take the Auditor-General's comments seriously; it is the role of the Auditor-General. As a general principle, would I be concerned of any improprieties as a minister of the Crown? Of course, I would be.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr BONSON: But, as we have heard evidence already, the Auditor-General did not necessarily agree with your line of questioning.

Ms CARNEY: All right. My question was not about the Auditor-General's view, it was actually about yours but, almost by accident, you have answered it. A final question on this one, minister. Is there any evidence, to your knowledge, of contract splitting in the contracts let by the Department of the Chief Minister to Sprout Creative?

Mr BONSON: In all genuineness, if you could just clarify the detail of that question, I am sure that the appropriate officers can answer that. They need further clarification and definition of that.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. You need a job. Instead of one company doing it and getting paid for it, falling under various quotas and so on, two companies do it - one does half, the other does the other half; pretty straightforward, pretty common.

Mr BONSON: Thank you for your question, member for Araluen. I defer to Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: I will defer to Mr Brad Irvine, the Executive Director of Procurement, on that one.

Mr IRVINE: Brad Irvine. I just want to get some clarification on the actual question. There are provisions where contracts are in place for exclusive supply that, in the event that that contractor cannot fulfil the obligations of any particular tender, they can give that work to another work supplier. Alternatively, and in a lot of cases, in the supplier that you are talking about, a lot of times period panel contracts are established and the work is distributed amongst those panel members.

Ms CARNEY: Through you, minister, is it the case then that a company can try to get a job, but says: 'We can only do half of it but another company over here can do the other half'? Do I understand from your answer that that does not happen?

Mr IRVINE: Not to my knowledge.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thanks. That is all for that output, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any more questions on Output 1.3?

Mrs BRAHAM: Just one question, Mr Chairman. Minister, there is going to be a lot of housing built in remote areas under contract. Normally, the work is put out to a consultant who then employs contractors. Can you advise me whether this work is going to be handled directly by Infrastructure and Transport and not through consultants? That is the story I am getting.

Mr BONSON: Thank you, member for Braiting. You are talking about the alliance contracting in issues to do with remote housing? Is that correct?

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry?

Mr BONSON: Is it alliance housing or contracting?

Mrs BRAHAM: The housing that is going to be built in remote communities - there are going to be large contracts for that.

Mr BONSON: Yes, thank you. There will be use of alliance contracting as a methodology, and that is to deliver the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program managed by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Sport. Alliance partners are selected through multi-stage tendering processes that deal primarily with the supply capacity rather than pricing, which is negotiated in later stages. The philosophy behind it is that this model operates as an open-book basis between the government and the private sector, alliance partners, in the roll-out of new housing and refurbishment of existing properties throughout the Northern Territory.

The main advantage of alliance contracting is that its risk is shared between government and alliance partners, as the project is jointly developed and the construction completed on a mutually-agreed basis. This eliminates costly re-tendering process. For any further information, I refer to Mr Symons.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is this a change in policy, minister?

Mr SYMONS: Member for Braiting, it is quite a different model of contracting so, instead of going out for competitive tender, basically, on a price basis, there is, if you like, a high-level consultant and that goes out to public tender, to coordinate the whole process. The Alliance Program Manager is by competitive tendering. Then, the building is dealt with separately. In very complex projects such as this one, for example, that involve the objective of increasing indigenous employment in that process as well as construction, as we all know from the history of indigenous housing in remote communities, it is not an easy process; it is quite a complex one. This is a model of contracting that has been adopted for this particular purpose. Alliance contracting has been used interstate for complex projects. It is the first time it has been used in the Northern Territory.

Mrs BRAHAM: The first time in the Territory?

Mr SYMONS: That is right.

Mrs BRAHAM: Who will actually oversee it?

Mr BONSON: Before Mr Symons fills in the detail, alliance contracting is, obviously, a big change in the methodology of how the NT government wants to deliver appropriate, efficient and cost-effective housing out bush. It is quite detailed and complex but, in all honesty, every member of this committee and other members are in the dark and I am offering an opportunity to get a briefing because it is a big shift and ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me though, minister, who will be the ultimate overseer of these programs?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: I defer to Mr Brad Irvine, Executive Director of Procurement. He has been involved in quite detailed discussions with the department concerned.

Mr IRVINE: I have had a very close association with Housing, which has stewardship of this project. There is a comprehensive team of people assembled to carry out that significant project. There are three levels of governance, which includes other agencies other than just Housing. They are, essentially, working

their way through that process. There are a lot of checks and balances are on the way and also a lot of accountability back to FaHCSIA, being the funding body of the Australian government.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you consider, minister, that it will be cost-effective? We have just heard about those houses that were built that ended up costing \$900 000 out on some remote communities. Is this going to be effective or is it going to add another layer of cost?

Mr BONSON: I believe that is a clear example of what this government does not want to do. We believe that this model will be a great shift in the way houses are delivered in remote areas. I pick up on what Mr Irvine said: there is going to be continued monitoring and reviewing of the whole process. This is being done in other states and territories. We are confident that, by working with private enterprise in an open-book process, we can deliver more effective, cost-efficient and appropriate housing in the bush, which also, as Mr Symons mentioned, takes into account the underlying problem that occurs out bush, which is real jobs and future training for indigenous people.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, what will happen to the existing housing association at Port Keats? There are a number of housing associations which may have the same type of concerns. Ntaria could be one.

Mr BONSON: Member for Braitling, as Mr Irvine touched on, there are a number of partners in this. That question was really for Mr Vatskalis as the Minister for Housing. It is my understanding, Mr Symons, that there is not really much more to add than that.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, DCIS is not involved in that part of the Housing administration.

Mrs BRAHAM: I do not know whether that is the answer the member for Nelson wanted, but thank you. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you have one more, member for Araluen?

Ms CARNEY: Just getting back to the contract splitting. I thought it was the case that, if you had a job up for grabs as it were, a couple of companies could say: 'We can both do that job'. Is it possible for one company to break a job into smaller parts and apply to those in that way? Is that what you understand by the term contract splitting?

Mr BONSON: This is more appropriately dealt with by Mr Irvine.

Mr IRVINE: Sorry, I misunderstood your definition of contract splitting.

Ms CARNEY: Lots of people probably have different definitions. I think there are several definitions of contract splitting.

Mr IRVINE: I can respond in this way: in some cases, depending on the nature of the work that we are discussing, primarily a lead company will prime that work and, yes, they may subcontract certain parts of it out. From a government perspective, we are still only paying the principal. We do not necessarily see a subcontractor arrangement, and we do not pay subcontractors directly. What the government agency would be doing is ensuring that that supplier can actually meet that requirement on time and on budget.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Nothing further.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you. That concludes consideration of Output 1.3.

I note that with regard to the following output questions on policy matters were addressed by the Chief Minister in his capacity as Minister for Information, Communication and Technology Policy on Tuesday.

Output - 1.4 Information and Communication Technology Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.4, Information and Communication Technology Services. Are there questions?

Ms CARNEY: I had many questions in this area but, in the interests of time, I do not think I will be asking any, I am so sorry. But we had them prepared.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, the member for Nelson has replaced the member for Braiitling. Do you have any questions?

Mr WOOD: I was going to ask whether we could get an update on the issues in relation a person hacking into the computer system, and what was the cost of the hacking? Have the problems that person caused all now been rectified?

Mr BONSON: Member for Nelson, I recognise that the member for Araluen raised this issue with me in the lift the other day. I do genuinely say that she would have asked this question but she has had to prioritise.

Ms CARNEY: No, I was just thinking about time for the member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It is a pretty important question.

Mr BONSON: There are a number of issues here and I could read through them but, again, in terms of ...

Mr WOOD: A summary will do.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, I think several ministers have, in addition to tabling graph-type documents, been happy to table their advice. Would that be appropriate in this instance?

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen and member for Nelson, if, for expediency sake, we could table it. I suppose the only issue - and you would both be well aware - is that this is in front of the courts and we just need to be careful that we do not have an unnecessary influence on that process. We are happy to. Mr Symons, would just like to take the opportunity to clarify one piece of information on this document.

Mr SYMONS: Despite the *NT News* headline, what actually happened was almost from the inside. Someone did not actually hack in from the outside. They actually used someone else's password and remote access. That is why we went to the trouble of changing passwords very rapidly. So, it was not actually external hacking. The person who has been charged is an ex-employee of one of our contractors, who used the password and external access of another contract employee.

Ms CARNEY: So can we formally table that?

Mr BONSON: Yes, we can.

Mr WOOD: I am happy with that. That is all the questions I have.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, that concludes consideration of Output 1.4 and Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – OFFICE LEASING MANAGEMENT **Output 2.1 – Office Leasing Management**

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Office Leasing Management; Output 2.1, Office Leasing Management. Questions?

Ms CARNEY: I narrowed it, and limited it to one. Minister, can you table - I am sure you have it - a list of all office space leased by the Northern Territory government?

Mr BONSON: Yes, we can do that, member for Araluen.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that it? Do you have any questions on this output, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0, subject to that document being tabled.

Non-Output Specific Budget-Related Questions

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

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Chairman. I will just pitch to you. Minister, you will be expecting these questions. Again, if you have them in table form, can you indicate you have them in table form and you are prepared to table them?

How many executives work for the department, both executive contract and non-contract? How many of those executives have personal assistants, executive assistants, executive information coordinators or administrative assistants? Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles?

Mr BONSON: I thank the member for the Araluen for her question. Yes, we do have an executive structure within the department and excellent administrative assistances. I defer to Mr Symons on this particular issue.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, the information about executives is part of the earlier document tabled – the departmental by level ...

Ms CARNEY: Great, thank you.

Mr SYMONS: ... but we can separately table the information in relation to personal assistants. The answer, I think, is about four point something.

Ms CARNEY: If you can table that document that would be great. Thank you very much, indeed. Do we have that ...

Mr BONSON: Member for Araluen, I am aware that, as you know, there are people fishing around. However, it is on the *Hansard*, and I assure that it will be given to you.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, thank you. How many staff in the department are still members of NTGPASS or Commonwealth Super?

Mr BONSON: Again, I refer to the member for ...

Ms CARNEY: The CEO?

Mr SYMONS: I am getting too old for a career change.

Mr BONSON: I presume that we do not have that information, but I will stand to be corrected. I defer to the CEO.

Mr SYMONS: Yes, that is correct. It is not recorded at agency level.

Ms CARNEY: Not recorded? Okay, thank you. Next one: executive contract officers have private use of vehicles as part of their contracts. I understand that they pay a contribution for this. How many other staff are able to home garage their vehicles or, otherwise, use it for private use? There is a follow-up: what is the rationale for each, and what is the FBT cost? Again, if you have it in table form, can you table it?

Mr BONSON: I defer to the CEO, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: We do not have it in table form, unfortunately, but the answer is two. There are two non-executive employees with home garaging. They do not have private plates. It is largely about not having secure garaging.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many traffic incidents - and I am talking about accidents - were departmental vehicles involved in, in 2007-08 to date, and was alcohol or non-wearing of seat belts a factor in any of them? If so, how many?

Mr BONSON: I defer to my CEO, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: The answer is four accidents. None involved alcohol or lack of use of seat belts.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many speeding infringements, including speed camera fines, were issued to departmental staff in 2007-08 to date – naturally, in their work vehicles? Although it would be interesting, but we will not go there.

Mr BONSON: I defer to Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Three.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Consultancies: can you provide a list - and I feel certain you can - of the consultancies that were engaged during the course of the 2007-08 year? Can you also provide details of how many ended up being more expensive than the initial costing due to variations, and who approved the variations?

Mr BONSON: We have that information and I have been advised that we can table it.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many square metres of office space does the department have per employee, and how does it compare to the government standard?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: We have the information - just hang on while we find the right spot. For DCIS agency, the average is currently 23 m² per FTE, and that compares with a standard, which I believe is 16.5 m².

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. What is the cost of artwork for campaigns in the department in 2007-08 to date?

Mr BONSON: Just for clarification, that is information campaigns that the department is undertaking, yes?

Ms CARNEY: Yes.

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: I believe the answer is zero. That is because the only function in DCIS where that kind of expenditure would be relevant to is the apprenticeship program, and the brochures were printed in the last financial year, so we have not had any artwork associated with that in this financial year.

Ms CARNEY: In order to, perhaps, skim through some other associated questions do I take it that DCIS does not actually produce much promotional material? Would that be a fair thing to say?

Mr SYMONS: Yes, that would be a fair summary.

Ms CARNEY: (inaudible) because everyone knows and loves them.

Mr SYMONS: We are a very quiet, efficient, effective department.

Ms CARNEY: Indeed, you are. That takes us to somewhere else. Minister, do you have a departmental liaison officer in your office?

Mr BONSON: No, I do not, but into the future, I could have. At present, I do not. At the moment, I rely on the support that you are seeing tonight - the excellent support from the executive team of DCIS.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. How many reviews or audits were put in place due to breaches of discipline of employees; for example, credit card abuse and so on?

Mr BONSON: I defer to the appropriate person, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: None.

Ms CARNEY: How many investigations were authorised by the minister or their CEO in 2007-08 to date in relation to IT abuse, over and above the hacker, and how many investigations resulted in disciplinary actions?

Mr BONSON: Thank you, Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: For DCIS as an agency, zero.

Ms CARNEY: How many investigations were there into ministerial officers' use of IT equipment and in particular the Internet, if any?

Mr BONSON: Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Zero.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Have any conflicts of interest been identified, or other significant issues regarding probity, in 2007-08 to date?

Mr BONSON: As you can imagine it is quite a broad question, but my belief is that we have an answer for that. Mr Symons.

Mr SYMONS: Zero, but because of some of the functions of that DCIS performs - for example, the major whole-of-government ICT contracts and also the procurement functions - we do have a policy internally in relation to conflict of interests that applies to all director level staff. They actually fill out the form - for example, that CEs fill out across the public service - identifying their interests, and I can say that there have been no conflict of interests identified.

Ms CARNEY: Were any of your department's premises subject to police investigation during 2007-08? If so, can you provide details as to the nature of the offences reported and outcomes thereto?

Mr SYMONS: There were two DCIS offices that were broken into during 2007-08. One was Harbour View Plaza and the other was the Palmerston office. At Harbour View, there are three break-ins over one weekend; Palmerston, two break-ins within three days. The culprits were caught in both cases.

Ms CARNEY: It follows that the police were called to the premises once you became aware of the break-ins?

Mr SYMONS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Police were not called for those premises for any other purposes?

Mr SYMONS: No.

Ms CARNEY: Were any assets written off that involved a police investigation? And, if so, how much?

Mr SYMONS: Yes, in relation to the two incidents I mentioned. Associated with the break-in at Harbour View Plaza, a vehicle was stolen and damaged. Costs for repairs were \$2358. In relation to the Palmerston office, there was cash lost from the RTM totalling \$5568. There was also some personal effects and social club money stolen.

Ms CARNEY: Treasury had the same problem. Treasury had their social club kitty knocked off.

Mr SYMONS: And there were some repairs to the ceiling and door, to \$1000.

Ms CARNEY: Antisocial, indeed. Thank you. Were any other assets written off for any other reasons? If so, can you provide details as to costs?

Mr SYMONS: No.

Ms CARNEY: Were any additional security measures installed in relation to the break-ins? If so, what were the costs?

Mr SYMONS: Not building security, but there was a procedural change in relation to the storage of cash at the RTM at Palmerston office.

Ms CARNEY: Has any employee in the department been assaulted on duty in 2007-08?

Mr SYMONS: One.

Ms CARNEY: Finally, how much did the department spend on travel last year? Can you provide a full breakdown of all the trips taken and the reason for travel? If you have that, then table it. What factors are taken into account when selecting the motel accommodation standard?

Mr BONSON: It is my understanding that we can table this document. If you would prefer to do that we will table the document or, if you prefer, we can read this out.

Ms CARNEY: You can table it, thank you.

Mr BONSON: It is on *Hansard* and I am sure that the officers will ensure that there is a copy of this tabled. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is time for this session. Minister, to you and all your officers who have been here this evening, on behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your time, patience and attendance at this late hour.

Mr BONSON: If I could just take this opportunity to thank all the officers you can see in the room for the hard work provided, and to all the departments that I represent. It was really appreciated by me and the committee. Thank you very much.

The committee suspended.

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

In committee in continuation:

MINISTER NATT'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRY, FISHERIES AND MINES

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I welcome the minister and would like him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines.

Mr NATT: Madam Deputy Chair, I would like to introduce to the Estimates Committee my department officials. On my right-hand side, I have my Chief Executive Officer, Mr John Carroll, and on the left-hand side, Mr Bernard Ho, who is the Chief Financial Officer. I will also be introducing Mr Richard Sellers, my Executive Director Minerals and Energy; Mr Rod Gobbey, Executive Director Primary Industries; and also Ms Heather Brayford, who is my Executive Director Fisheries, when the time arises. In response to the operational issues of the department, I will at times be calling on these or other departmental officials, where appropriate, to provide the information you request.

I will give you an overview of the outlook of the Primary Industry, Fisheries and Minerals and Energy activity in the Northern Territory. The Territory economy remains strong and robust with predictions that it will outperform all other Australian jurisdictions over the next five years. A major part of this impressive performance is provided by the business areas of my portfolio.

Fishing remains vital to the Territory economy, comprising commercial production, recreation and indigenous sectors, and includes wild harvest catch and aquaculture. The value of commercial fishing production during 2006-07, including the Commonwealth-managed Northern Prawn Fishery, is estimated to be \$139m. The immediate outlook for Fisheries is extremely positive, with the contribution from recreational fishing exceeding \$25m per annum, and aquaculture expected to rise, or perhaps exceed, \$30m during 2008-09. To obtain an insight into the contribution recreational fishing makes to the Territory, \$200 000 per annum over two years has been allocated to undertake a new recreational fishing survey. \$1m has also been provided to improve recreational fishing infrastructure to make fishing even better. We have the highest participation rates of recreational fishing in the country, and more than 100 000 tourists say that they wet a line in the Territory each year.

Primary Industry covers a diverse range of industry sectors, including cattle and other livestock, horticulture crops and plantation forestry. For the current 2007-08 year, the value of all production is estimated to be around \$396m, or 8% up on the previous year. The outlook for 2008-09 is for a further modest growth in value to \$428m. The value of the local pastoral industry is buoyant, led by the live cattle export trade. In 2006-07, 57% of Territory cattle turn-off was exported, with the remaining 43% destined for interstate markets. Continued drought conditions in southern states has led to a 23% decrease in interstate cattle movements, while live cattle export numbers have rebounded by 8.4% in 2006-07. The value of Northern Territory cattle production for 2007-08 is estimated to increase by 6.4% to \$205m. The flow-on effects from the cattle industry are major contributors to the Territory's regional economies, particularly the transport and retail sectors. Production value from other livestock for 2006-07 jumped 34% to \$10.2m, and is expected to remain steady over the next 12 months.

Value from mixed farming reached \$18.9m, covering hay/fodder, pasture seed production, cereal crops such as sorghum and maize, peanuts, sesame and soy beans. Hay production remains buoyant and continues to be a major field crop in the medium term. The value of horticulture production during 2006-07 increased by 52% to \$145m, with recorded increases in mangoes, melons and table grapes.

High production and commodity prices boosted the value of the mining sector by 13%, pushing its value to a record \$4.65bn. The combined value of mineral and energy production grew by over \$1bn to \$6.22bn for 2006-07, with mineral and energy production and processing forecast to reach \$6.7bn in 2007-08 and \$7.5bn in 2008-09. Mineral exploration expenditure continues to grow, increasing by 23% during 2006-07 to a value of \$92.2m. Gold exploration has attracted the most activity, \$22.4m, followed by uranium, \$19.1m, then base metals, other minerals and diamonds. Petroleum exploration has increased over recent years and, while much of the activity has occurred offshore, onshore exploration expenditure is to increase by 55% in 2008-09 to \$13.45m. The first onshore exploration well in Central Australia in over 20 years commenced 12 months ago, with a further seven wells planned for 2008-09.

The Territory is a vast land of rich minerals and future opportunities, that is why I am pleased to announce a boost to the *Bringing Forward Discovery* initiative of a further \$2.4m. *Bringing Forward Discovery* is now worth \$14.4m over four years, and aims to increase mining activity in the Territory through increased exploration, particularly in greenfield regions. Through the Ore-Struck campaign, the *Bringing Forward Discovery* program seeks to attract new interstate and international exploration investment, especially from China and Japan.

In the southern region, Alice Springs is part of the national Solar City program, with the Territory committing \$4.7m in cash and in-kind over seven years, and the Commonwealth allocating \$12m. Another initiative is the Renewable Remote Power Generation Program, a Commonwealth-funded and Northern Territory administered program, which has seen \$11.7m allocated in rebates during 2006-07.

The future economic outlook in my areas of responsibility is strong. Since its inception, my department has always come in on budget, and this will be repeated again for this financial year of 2007-08. Madam Deputy Chair, I am pleased to answer any questions that the honourable members may have.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Thank you, minister. For the purposes of *Hansard*, I would like to introduce the committee: members for Nelson, Goyder, Stuart, Greatorex and Katherine. I ask that departmental staff state their name before speaking each time for *Hansard*. Are there any questions on the opening statement?

Mrs MILLER: No, I agree with you entirely. There are vast levels of rich minerals in the Northern Territory; you should be very grateful for that.

Mr NATT: We are.

Mr WOOD: The minister mentioned onshore petroleum exploration. Why do you control onshore and not control offshore?

Mr NATT: Would it be better to answer that in the output that is allocated, or do you want ...

Mr WOOD: Because you mentioned it in your statement, I thought I would ask because it is more a generic question regarding why you have control over one and not the other.

Mr NATT: Oh, we can do it now. We are pleased to say that Central Petroleum is undertaking some exploration in Central Australia. I understand they oversee the exploration.

Mr WOOD: I was trying to find out why your department does not cover offshore petroleum.

Mr NATT: I defer to Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: John Carroll, Chief Executive Officer. The offshore arrangements are controlled by the Commonwealth under the *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act* arrangements, and the Northern Territory administers, on behalf of the Commonwealth, that area in Commonwealth waters. We are reimbursed every year for the cost of doing that, and we act on behalf of the Commonwealth there. Onshore, it is in the Territory's jurisdiction and the Territory organises and is responsible for it, and issues all the exploration licences in its own right, whereas, in the Commonwealth waters, we do it on behalf of the Commonwealth. We act as delegates of the Commonwealth ministry in Commonwealth waters. So, we always talk about them being separate because (a) they are separate regulatory regimes; and (b) the activities offshore tend to be different from those onshore - different issues, conditions and opportunities.

Mr WOOD: Who promotes exploration offshore? If you are assigned to promote exploration onshore, do you have a role trying to promote exploration offshore?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: In relation to offshore development, every year the Commonwealth releases what it calls Acreage, and that is done at the national APPEA Conference which is held around Australia. Subsequently, the Commonwealth promotes that overseas. They have a road show that goes, I know, to Tokyo and I believe to Europe and America as well, promoting the opportunities for exploration. In offshore waters, it is done on an annual basis and it is a competitive process. Onshore, it is a different process.

Mr WOOD: Finally, where is the demarcation line between the Commonwealth area of control and the Territory in relation to the sea?

Mr CARROLL: Three-mile limit.

Mr WOOD: So, you could still have an offshore exploration within the three-mile limit and that would come under your control?

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Just on that issue - and I will raise it again later - are there other areas in the Northern Territory where it is likely that companies will start looking for oil, especially because of the high cost of oil at the present time in the Territory?

Mr NATT: I understand there is. Again, for particulars, I will hand that to Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: The minister mentioned the Sweetpea operation. Central Petroleum is also doing a large amount of work in the Centre. As I understand it, most of the Territory is now either under exploration licence or exploration licence application for petroleum. So, people are interested in doing it and we are very keen to encourage them to do so.

Mr NATT: About 90% of it, I understand, is under licence.

Mr WOOD: Now, some of them are becoming active, I presume?

Mr NATT: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Is that because of the rising cost of fuel, do you think, making it more attractive for companies to come and dig a hole?

Mr NATT: Well, it is a hypothetical, I think. It is hard to say. A lot of oil exploration companies are very active out there at the moment; they are looking at every piece of land they can get. Obviously, we are a very attractive proposition to them.

Mr WOOD: I have no further comment on the opening statement.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Output 1.1 – Minerals and Energy

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY MANAGEMENT

Output 2.1 – Minerals and Energy

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2008-09 as they relate to the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Resource Industry Development; Output 1.1, Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Madam Deputy Chair, are we able to put two outputs together, because there are only two: Output 1.1, Resource Industry Development, Minerals and Energy, and Output 2.1, Resource Industry Management, Minerals and Energy? Is it acceptable to put both those outputs together?

Mr NATT: I do not have any problems with that, member for Katherine.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: As long as, once we have completed, we do not go back.

Mrs MILLER: You agree, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: I am checking. Within that Resource Industry Development in the annual report, they break it up into four sections as well. As long as we can go back and forwards within that, I do not mind.

Mrs MILLER: I will try to keep it so that we are not jumping all over the place and we do not have people jumping up and down.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Minister, last year you said that Arafura Resources was nothing to do with you - that was on 29 May – and all you did was approve the mining application. Two minutes later, you said you were in constant conversation with them; you set up a committee to work with them. Now, we have subsequently found out that you opened their office. Could you explain why, in one breath, you had nothing to do with it and, in the next breath, you were all over them and opening their office?

Mr NATT: I am not sure of the line of the questioning, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: I am just trying to determine whether you understood what Arafura Resources were doing; you said they were nothing to do with you.

Mr NATT: That is not quite true. The line of questioning was from the then Leader of the Opposition in relation to setting up their processing plant in the harbour. I said to her, at that stage, that it did not come under my jurisdiction. If the processing plant was to be set up on the mining site, it would come under my jurisdiction. If it was to be built outside of that mining site, it would come under the departments responsible for that area - in that case, it was the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

Mrs MILLER: The implication was that all you had to do with it at all was just to approve the mining application. Is that right?

Mr NATT: That is correct.

Mrs MILLER: That is all you did?

Mr NATT: I approved the mining application, correct.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Uranium storage. On Channel 9, on 3 June, Arafura Resources expressed its concern that the only land being offered to it was Middle Arm. It does not want to go there because of its respect for Darwin Harbour. What are you going to do to attract them here to Darwin? Or is it the case that your incapacity to plan is now going to scare potential developers away?

Mr NATT: Member for Katherine, the Arafura Resources project has now been made a major project, and that now comes under the jurisdiction of the Chief Minister's office. I suggest that that question should have been asked of the Chief Minister.

Mrs MILLER: So that means, minister, that it could be out at Middle Arm?

Mr NATT: Again, you would have to talk with the Chief Minister's Office. They are the ones doing the negotiations with Arafura.

Mrs MILLER: So you know nothing about Arafura Resources?

Mr NATT: I know what is happening on site with their exploration activities and with the set-up of their mill and whatever. They are dealing directly with the Chief Minister's Office in regard to that, as a major project.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Looks like the Chief Minister is just about going to become the minister for Mines. In Budget Paper No 3, page 293, you predicted dealing with 1600 site-reported incidents. The final estimate on page 226, you have only received 150. Why was the budget so far off the mark?

Mr NATT: I will pass that question to Mr Richard Sellers, Executive Director of Minerals and Energy

Mr SELLERS: Richard Sellers, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy. Sorry, member for Katherine. Could I just have that page again?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, certainly. The 2007-08 Budget, Budget Paper No 3, page 293.

Mr SELLERS: The number in 2006-07 was an estimate of site-reported incidents. There has been a shift in policy that has moved mine safety staff over to WorkSafe in the interim. The fact that we would have been running on numbers, perhaps that high at the time, would be reflected in that estimate. The numbers coming down is a good thing, you want less incidents on-site. However, I suspect there is also a factor in the reporting that would have gone over to WorkSafe with the safety staff.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, how much are you expecting to make from stamp duties levied against exploration licences?

Mr NATT: Stamp duty comes under the portfolio of Treasury. Treasury handle all stamp duty issues with mining companies, so that should be a question you ask of the Treasurer.

Mrs MILLER: So you do not know that one either? I am still a little concerned about Arafura Resources. When was it announced as a major project?

Mr NATT: Within the last six to eight weeks, from memory.

Mr CARROLL: I do not believe it has been formally announced, but the company was advised, probably six weeks to two months ago.

Mrs MILLER: So there has been no formal announcement of it yet?

Mr CARROLL: Not that I have seen, but that does not mean to say that it has not been announced.

Mr NATT: I understand that the Chief Minister's Office has made contact with Arafura Resources and talked over a number of issues that they are discussing in relation to setting up their processing plant, and other issues contained within that processing area. That has been made a major project by the Chief Minister's Office.

Mrs MILLER: Because it has not been announced, it still must be under your portfolio. Does that stand to reason?

Mr NATT: No.

Mrs MILLER: When did it become a major project and go to the Chief Minister's Department?

Mr NATT: We have just answered that question, member for Katherine. We believe it is within the last six to eight weeks.

Mrs MILLER: So we are actually not quite sure where it is at the moment?

Mr NATT: Again, it is within the realms of the Chief Minister's Office. They have been dealing extensively with Arafura Resources to try and keep their activities within the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, so we will have to chase that one up and find out exactly where it is.

Mr NATT: Again, I am happy to answer mining questions. This is a processing question and I have nothing to do with the processing side of things.

Mrs MILLER: You are development though. Is there development on it?

Mr NATT: Yes, but it is mining.

Mrs MILLER: You still should understand where it is - it is development. Arafura Resources are trying ...

Mr NATT: It is a major project under the Chief Minister's Office. They are doing all the particulars. If it is activities on the ground in the way of exploration or mining, then it falls into my portfolio. This is what I tried to explain to the member for Araluen last year.

Mrs MILLER: All right. So, you do not know that one either. Talking about the stamp duty - and you said you do not know how much is levied against the exploration licences - has any concern been expressed to you by miners that they are pretty alarmed about that stamp duty? Are they alarmed about it?

Mr NATT: Sorry, which stamp duty are you referring to?

Mrs MILLER: I am talking about the stamp duty levied against exploration licences. Has there been some concern expressed to you?

Mr NATT: I did have a couple of phone calls - well, my office had a couple of phone calls - from mining companies expressing their concern. The stamp duty on mining exploration licences was to solve a couple of loopholes that were there, and also to bring us into line with other jurisdictions within Australia. I understand that, since that announcement, the Resources Council has met with Treasury. I also understand that Treasury has spoken to the companies that expressed concern and they are more than happy with the answers they have received in relation to the stamp duty question.

Mrs MILLER: Why was the stamp duty introduced in the first place? Who were the mining companies that were cheating?

Mr NATT: I am unaware of the mining companies that were cheating. I have never been brought up to speed with that. Again, the stamp duty was imposed, I understand, to solve a couple of loopholes and to bring us into line with other jurisdictions.

Mrs MILLER: So, really, you have actually put it in as another tax. You have introduced it as another tax. There was no company avoiding the tax, nobody was a cheat?

Mr NATT: Member for Katherine, again, you would have to speak to Treasury. They are aware of all the circumstances there; they deal with stamp duty and any taxes. I am not the minister for the Treasury.

Mrs MILLER: But you would have been aware of it if it was for mining. You would be aware if somebody was cheating?

Mr NATT: I was aware of it when the stamp duty announcement was made.

Mrs MILLER: Are you able to ask your CEO if he is aware of anybody?

Mr NATT: I do not think it is a fair question we should be answering. It is a question you should be asking of the Treasurer. It is her portfolio. Stamp duty and taxes comes under Treasury.

Mrs MILLER: I am sure, as the minister for Mines, you would know if there is a company that has been cheating. Otherwise, why would this stamp duty have been introduced?

Mr NATT: I have just told you why the stamp duty was introduced, it was there to solve a couple of loopholes and to bring us into line with other jurisdictions. Again, those questions should be asked of the Treasurer.

Mrs MILLER: I will ask you one more in this area. How many tax cheats in the mining industry have been prosecuted for tax avoidance?

Mr NATT: Again, that it is a problem for the Treasurer.

Mrs MILLER: So it looks like that stamp duty has been introduced just as a tax grab?

Mr NATT: I have explained to you, member for Katherine, why it was introduced.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many trips have you made to China in the last 12 months?

Mr NATT: I have made one trip to China.

Mrs MILLER: How many staff did you take with you from DPIFM?

Mr NATT: Four.

Mrs MILLER: How much did the trip cost, and what benefits have flowed to the Northern Territory as a result of that trip?

Mr NATT: I love to talk about this, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Tell me how many Chinese companies have taken up tenders whilst you are answering that one?

Mr NATT: Bear with me, I cannot wait to tell you. November last year was my second trip to China. We have been over there for the last two years now to visit the China Mining Congress, which is one of the biggest mining congresses in and around South-East Asia. We were there for four to five days. While we were there, we made a presentation at the congress. We attended a stall at the congress, in conjunction with Team Australia, and we have a particular allocation to help any companies there that are interested in the Northern Territory. The report tabulates joint ventures announced and in progress, exploration licences, applications and grants, uptake agreements, in-bound delegations and potential business partners between the Northern Territory exploration and mining companies, and Chinese investors are matched with the department.

The highlights since my visit are that 11 companies have come into the Northern Territory with visits, 22 projects profiles in total have been submitted by Northern Territory exploration companies, highlighting an increase in interest to promote Northern Territory projects to potential investors. There have been two joint ventures announced. Thor Mining has joint ventured with CITIC, and NuPower with Legend Investment International. There are several other joint ventures and farm-ins under discussion as we sit here today.

There has also been substantial interest to invest in the Territory. One particular company that has shown intense interest is a group called the Stone Group, which was introduced to five Northern Territory exploration companies earlier this year and has expressed interest in investing three of the presented projects. As you can see, they have been really worthwhile activities from April to June. We have again had inbound visits from the Stone Group to meet with Emerson Resources, Brumby Resources and Uramet Minerals, and a visit by HeluimJang to Perth to follow-up with Sandfire Resources.

My CEO, Mr John Carroll, led a Northern Territory delegation to Beijing in May, with industry participants including Trustcott Resources, Western Desert Resources, Arafura Resources, Proto Resources and Clayton Utz. That was a follow-up trip from the November trip we undertook.

Regular inbound visits are planned for 2008-09. Again, we will try and lead an industry delegation to China in November this year. We have had particular interest in China. The first visit we made to China - and I must congratulate the members of my department for this, especially Gao and Lisa Mutch. The groundwork they undertook to set up this particular visit was groundbreaking for the Northern Territory. We managed to get visits with the China Mining Association and the China Chamber of Commerce of Minerals, Metals and Energy. We have signed memorandums of understanding with those two organisations. In total, they probably have around 5000 to 6000 members. We have our website linked to their websites now. All the information that is contained on our Mines and Energy website is now available to Chinese companies at the press of a button. There has been intense interest in the Northern Territory from the Chinese. Our main push is that we are a vast land, we are rich in minerals, and we are open for business. I believe that is really starting to prove worthwhile for the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, have you also done a similar trip to Japan?

Mr NATT: Since our trips to China, Japan has shown an interest as well. I am pleased to say that Mr John Carroll visited Japan earlier this year, and a follow-up to India as well, with a bit of interest shown there. With more information, I hand that on to Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: Following the minister's visit to Beijing in November last year, I went to Japan to see whether there were opportunities for the Northern Territory. In that visit, I met with the Australian Ambassador, the Japan Mining Industry Association, and with JOGMEC, which is the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation, a government organisation that is involved heavily in exploration offshore from Japan; as well as the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry. At that visit, it was quite clear that the Japanese are very interested in exploration and the opportunities in the Northern Territory. In fact, one of the very interesting things - as an aside - is that in the meeting I had with the Japan Mining Industry Association, one of the people had printouts from the Internet of the minister's media statement from our China visit. I was asked questions regarding what the Northern Territory is doing with China, why we are doing that with China, and you must come and talk to us, and issues of that nature.

Following that visit, the government agreed that we would go back again when we did what we call our technical visit to China in May of this year and, on the 19, 20, 21 and 22 May we were in Tokyo. In that time, in conjunction with the Australian Embassy, we conducted a seminar that attracted over 100 registrants. Unfortunately, we had a typhoon on the day and only 80 turned up, but we have no control over the weather. The interesting thing about that seminar was the high level of interest. We organised it jointly with JOGMEC, who did an evaluation, which indicated that the people who attended gave it a score

of 4.1 out of five in its relevance, interest and whether it would relate to their business. We thought that was a worthwhile exercise.

We also met with a number of companies such as Itoshu, and a range of other companies, to talk to them about the Territory. We had with us private sector organisations. For the presentations in May that we did, ERA presented in both China and Japan for us, and explained about doing business in the Territory so that people in those marketplaces could understand that, if you come to the Territory, we will work with you and you will get outcomes from the investment you make. Is there more information you would like about that?

Mrs MILLER: No, but it would be good, as you continue your communication with India and Japan, that that is made public. It is very interesting and it certainly has some potential for the Northern Territory. Of course, I am thinking about uranium as well, which would be an interesting one.

Mr CARROLL: The minister has made a report to the House, I believe, last week on that visit. We are actively working on it. You mentioned India. On the way back from Tokyo, I spent a day in India to meet with the Export-Import Bank of India in Mumbai, as well as a major group called Maytas. Maytas are planning to visit the Territory to look at opportunities as a result of that visit in the next couple of weeks. So we really had some outcomes from that. I might mention, though, that, because of our overall resource situation, including our skills base, at the moment we are not planning to get heavily into India, simply because we are very stretched with the amount of interest we have from China and Japan. We believe that it is better to be focused than just to spread too thinly. I suppose the way I would describe it is, it is better to have a proper sandwich than a piece of bread with Vegemite spread thinly on it. So what we are trying to do ...

Mr Wood: There is nothing wrong with Vegemite.

Mrs MILLER: Nothing wrong with Vegemite is there, member for Nelson.

Mr CARROLL: I am not commenting on the value of Vegemite, except to say that the analogy was about the fact that we just cannot do everything everywhere in the world. There is lots of interest around the world. Focusing on China is very important for us. We have the skills, we have the knowledge, we have two people in the department - one is a native Chinese speaker, as well as somebody who has worked in both Beijing and Hong Kong - who do extremely good work on behalf of the Territory.

The interest we have been able to attract has been quite astounding. When the Stone Group came to the Territory, for example, in May, they brought with them two representatives of the China Development Bank, the organisation in China which funds much overseas activity for the Chinese. As a result of that, we have followed up with high level visits in May, and there is potentially further cooperation between the Territory and the China Development Bank. We have very good relationships with the China Chamber of Commerce of Metals, Minerals and Chemicals Importers and Exporters (CCCMC).

Our relationship with them just goes from strength to strength. For example, when we were in Beijing in May, they had organised a seminar for us and had planned for 40 people to come. On the day, 80 turned up. They had a room like this and they had to extend the room to fit all the people in. So, there is no question that there is significant interest in the Territory in both China and Japan. I think there is interest around the rest of the world, but we are focused on those two markets simply because that is where our capacity and our knowledge is.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Katherine, just on getting the message out on what we are doing. We, obviously, have the Internet and other things that happen. On top of that, there is a thing called an Investment Alert that the same group that is involved in Japan and China e-mail out monthly to interested parties that are on this list, what the update is on what we are doing. Anyone who wants to be on that list can register through the Internet or by calling the department. So, while there are other mechanisms such as reports in parliament, we are trying to ensure that the investors know what is going on as well.

Mrs MILLER: So, it is all looking very hopeful, minister; there is going to be a huge demand from those countries, which have a great need. That takes me back to taxing - stamp duties and putting taxes on mining. You must surely be interested in the comments that mining companies have made to you about the taxes? Surely, you must be aware of the impact that may have on them?

Mr NATT: You are talking about the stamp duty issue?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr NATT: Again, I have had contact from two companies. I have referred that to the Treasurer, the Treasurer's department has spoken to those two companies. The Treasurer's department has also spoken to the NT Resources Council and gave them a full briefing, and they represent all the mining companies that are operating in the Northern Territory. They are more than happy with the result of their meeting. Again, it is a question that should be asked of the Treasurer. I do not have any input into taxing or stamp duties whatsoever.

Mrs MILLER: Well, the information you are just saying is that they are more than happy. That is not the information and advice that I have been getting - they are not happy.

Mr NATT: I suggest, member for Katherine, that you go and have a talk to the president or members of the Resources Council. They had a meeting with Treasury representatives just over a week ago. The information I have received from the president is that they were more than happy with the briefing they have had and with the results they have achieved with Treasury.

Mrs MILLER: It will be interesting to hear the version that I get, because it is not the same as you are getting. They are not happy with it at all.

Mr NATT: I do not know who you are talking to, member for Katherine, but I can assure you that, as I said, I spoke to the President of the Resources Council and he has assured me that he has been more than happy with the briefing and with the results obtained from that briefing.

Mrs MILLER: He might have been happy with the way the briefing went, but not the actual result of ...

Mr NATT: No, I have just said that he was happy with the results that he achieved with Treasury.

Mr Wood: Was he happy with the tax?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that is right, member for Nelson. It will be very interesting to see what happens there, because you have a different view of it than the people that have been talking to me, minister.

Can you please advise what processes were used to determine the final applicant for the Angela and Pamela uranium prospect near Alice Springs? And, given that your department used consultants to conduct probity work, how much did the whole process cost government? I want to know what processes were used to determine that final one and how much that process cost?

Mr NATT: As we all know, the Angela and Pamela deposit is situated about 25 km south of Alice Springs. On 6 December 2006, 18 reservations of occupations were revoked, releasing the areas of land for potential exploration. Of those areas, R0 1292, which is the Angela and Pamela uranium prospect, attracted significant interest; 37 exploration licence applications were lodged. In light of the significant interest received and the potential value of the uranium prospect, Stantons International were engaged to act as probity auditors during the assessment. A rigorous, transparent and fair assessment of the applications was undertaken by representatives of the Northern Territory and Commonwealth governments, and the joint application of Cameco Australia and Paladin Energy Minerals was recommended as the preferred applicant. The assessment of the applications was delayed due to lengthy litigation processes instigated by McCleary Investments with respect to a mineral claim dispute. McCleary's case, as we know, was dismissed by the Supreme Court and, subsequently, the appeal was also dismissed in late 2007.

Prior to the final grant of the exploration licence, it is a requirement of the *Mining Act* and the *Native Title Act* to publicly advertise the application and to allow a period for objections and comments, and that is around a four-month period for the *Native Title Act* and a two-month period for the *Mining Act*. The application was advertised on 27 March in the *Northern Territory News* and the *Courier Mail*. Any objections or comments received were assessed as per statutory requirements. The exploration licence is for the approval to explore only, and exploration could take up to six years to complete. Should the explorers wish to commence mining activities, they will be required to submit an Application for Mineral Lease in accordance with the strict Northern Territory and Commonwealth requirements.

A group called the Alice Springs Angela Pamela Collective has been formed to object to the mining of Angela and Pamela deposits. The explorers are currently liaising with the community to address their questions and concerns. The Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines has created a website containing information on the Angela and Pamela uranium prospects, including links to other relevant

sources of information. If there is any other information that you would like to know on the probity auditors, I will hand that across to Mr Richard Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: The total cost for the Angela and Pamela probity services was \$80 802. Obviously, the probity auditors were with us for the entire process. As the process was delayed and questions were raised then, obviously, they had to help us deal with it. Do we normally have probity auditors on big projects like this? This is the first one for Minerals and Energy but, should I have a similar complex project like this that attracts a similar level of applications, I would consider having them again. In fact, they assisted greatly with the process. They actually were the ones that took the first level of calls from the applicants, and dealt with the day-to-day questions on how the process was going. Of course, at the end of the process, they provided a report that commented on what we had done, how we had done it, and how it compared to other similar processes that they had audited in the past.

Mr CARROLL: On the question of probity, when we were overseas, one of the issues with Angela and Pamela was that there was significant international interest in it. We were very concerned about the Territory's reputation and how it was processed. We were very careful when we were overseas, both in November and May - though May this year was okay because it had been decided by then - but November last year, that we avoided meetings with people who were applicants, and we made sure that we did not talk about the issue at all. In fact, on the advice of the probity auditors, we had representatives of the Australian Embassy attend all our meetings and record what we were doing so that it was, if you like, 'lily white'.

It was interesting because, when I went back to Japan in May of this year, I had a lengthy session with the Director General of Minerals in the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, who I did not meet in November because of probity issues. At the meeting in May, we went through the process that the minister has just explained that we went through for Angela and Pamela. Having the probity auditor meant that we were not criticised by the Japanese government, or have not been criticised by any of the 37 companies that were involved. Well, 36 of the 37 are probably not happy that they did not get it, but none of them have said to us that, because of the way we went through the process, we treated them unfairly or have not done the wrong thing.

I have to say, personally, that probity auditors can be difficult to deal with, and they were difficult, I think Mr Sellers will tell you, on a couple of occasions. But, the end product was a very good one. The Territory will benefit from the expenditure that we had in the current financial year to make that happen.

Mrs MILLER: I certainly believe that you have to be very careful about your international reputation, that is for sure. I was just interested as to how much that cost.

Minister, why do you want to drop the maximum number for blocks that can be applied for under an exploration licence from 500 to 250, which can result in a greater workload for an already overworked and under-resourced Titles Division?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to my Executive Officer.

Mr SELLERS: Basically, there is a package of measures that we are implementing at the moment to try and ensure that people who have exploration tenements, exploration licences, are actually undertaking the work that they bid to undertake on those leases. In that package, there are reductions on the amount you can apply for, there is more rigorous scrutiny on the money that they are spending against their proposed money they are going to spend, so that we actually get a continuation of turnover of land. There are also provisions in there, after two years, for the amount of tenements you have to start to shrink, so you focus in on the things that you are looking for. The intent of that is to actually open up more land for others to come and explore.

Certainly, the response we have been getting as we have been moving around the country and the world talking about the Territory is that people are very interested in turnover. People are concerned if - and it is just their term - 'land banking' is going on where people are obtaining leases to prospective land and then sitting on it for a period of time in the hope that it will become valuable and be able to on-sell it or joint venture into it. This is a mechanism to get the money being spent on the ground and, with the money being spent on the ground, we hope that they will make some discoveries. If they do not make the discoveries, then they focus in on the area they are on, and leave the other areas that they have for someone else to have a look at. So, that is the strategy.

Mrs MILLER: In other words, it is to open it up?

Mr SELLERS: Trying to open it up, yes.

Mrs MILLER: Even though it looks like it is frozen?

Mr SELLERS: Yes. It seems a little counter-intuitive, but the overall effect is that there are increasingly amounts of land that have been under exploration licence for a period of time becoming available again. On our website, we have areas where, with the tier system, people can log in and see what is happening on a daily basis. People watch with interest as these become available and then they start bidding for them as well.

Mrs MILLER: It makes sense now. Minister, I am going to go back to the stamp duty again. Could you please explain why you supported a Cabinet decision to apply stamp duty to the transfer of exploration licences without any consultation with industry? There was no announcement by you or by the Treasurer. Why was that decision not included in the budget statement? Have you done any cost analysis as to the impact on the industry?

Mr NATT: I had a meeting with my CEO and sought his opinion on what it would mean to the industry if a stamp duty was imposed. That opinion was given to Cabinet. Again, I go back to the situation where it is going to bring us into line with other jurisdictions and it closes off a couple of loopholes. For that reason, the stamp duty was imposed.

Mrs MILLER: So you were part of that decision in Cabinet?

Mr NATT: Sorry?

Mrs MILLER: You were part of that decision?

Mr NATT: I form part of Cabinet, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Well, that is what I originally asked you right back in about question 1 or 2. So, you did support that Cabinet decision to apply stamp duty?

Mr NATT: Well, again, Cabinet business is Cabinet business, it is confidential. I sit on Cabinet and the decision was made by Cabinet - simple as that.

Mrs MILLER: Did you put up a fight for the industry?

Mr NATT: I am not at liberty to expose that. I sit on Cabinet and that is where it stands.

Mrs MILLER: You are the Mines minister. Did you try to protect the industry?

Mr NATT: I conveyed the thoughts of the CEO to the Cabinet and that is where it is at.

Mrs MILLER: Have you done a cost analysis as to the impact on the industry, minister?

Mr NATT: Again, you would have to ask the Treasury. Treasury do all the sums when it comes to stamp duty and taxes.

Mrs MILLER: So, you are not aware of what the impact is going to be to the industry?

Mr NATT: Again, you will have to ask Treasury. They do all the ...

Mrs MILLER: I am asking you. You are not aware.

Mr NATT: I am telling you, member for Katherine, it is a Treasury position. They are the ones who do all the analysis on those sort of figures, on stamp duty and taxes, and they are the ones that make the decisions in those circumstances.

Mrs MILLER: But my question is: you are not aware of what the impact is going to be?

Mr NATT: I am aware.

Mrs MILLER: You are aware?

Mr NATT: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: So, how much it is going to cost them?

Mr NATT: I understand that it is minimal.

Mrs MILLER: So, it is minimal. Can you give me some sort of idea what you consider minimal?

Mr NATT: No, I cannot. It is based on exploration licences, how many there were, and whatever. As I said, this has all been explained to the Resources Council. The Resources Council is aware of all of the calculations that will be undertaken by Treasury, and they have been more than happy with the answers they have received.

Mrs MILLER: Well, that is not the information that I have, as I have said to you. They are vehemently opposed to it.

Mr NATT: Well, I do not know how many companies you have spoken to, member for Katherine, but I can assure you that the Resources Council is well aware of it now. They were happy with the replies they received from Treasury.

Mrs MILLER: Well, they might be well aware of it, but they are not happy, minister. They are not happy.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I take a moment to introduce the member for Blain who has joined the committee. Welcome.

Mr MILLS: Thank you very much, good to be here.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many indigenous employees are employed in the industry in the Northern Territory?

Mr NATT: Member for Katherine, you are obviously talking about the mining industry?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr NATT: Okay. We have some good programs working in Minerals and Energy. The programs aim to increase exploration and mining on land to provide benefits for all Territorians. The increase in the number of indigenous employees in DPIFM: on 14 March this year, DPIFM had 30 identified indigenous employees. Their work continues to implement the DPIFM Indigenous Employment Strategy and to increase this number to 44 by the end of this year. The DPIFM Indigenous Apprentice program achieved success with the 2007 intake of apprentices, with seven completing their respective qualifications and apprentices in 2008. We have enabled employment for seven of the apprentices, with two permanently appointed with DPIFM as Technical Officers Level 1. Two are employed on temporary contracts with DPIFM; one for 12 months and the other for six months on the Administrative Officer level; and one employed by another Northern Territory Public Service agency on a temporary contract. Two have been offered further apprenticeships to continue their studies in their chosen field. I will hand over to my CEO, who controls the apprenticeship intake for the department.

Mr CARROLL: Member for Katherine, I believe you asked about employment in the industry rather than the department?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, that is right.

Mr CARROLL: To finish the minister's point about the department, the latest information I have is that we have 32 indigenous identified people. In a department of about 500, I do not think that is good enough. I have a personal commitment to increasing the number of indigenous identified people in the department. If the committee would like to hear about that, I am happy to talk at some length about the things we are doing there. However, that is not the question, so I will leave that in case you want to ask it later.

In terms of the industry, we have a very strong commitment to working with industry to encourage them to increase the number of indigenous employees they have. They are all very conscious of it. The majors are, in a sense, ahead of the game compared to us, for example. We had a meeting with the board of ERA and the minister earlier this week, at which they told us that they had nearly 20% of their staff identifying as

indigenous. They were very conscious of the fact that the people who they employed did not come from the country the mine is located on, and they are working extremely hard to try and deal with that. There are a number of issues for all miners in terms of how they get job-ready people, people with the skills, how people who have not been in full-time employment work 12 hour shifts for seven day rosters, and all those sorts of issues that come up with the mining industry.

I am not aware of any mining company of significant size in the Territory that does not have a strong and stated commitment to indigenous employment. All the international majors, such as Rio Tinto, BHP and Newmont have international programs that are about engaging the local people where they mine. They are all very conscious. It would be fair to say that all of them are making significant inroads into what has been a very difficult area to get outcomes in.

Mrs MILLER: While we are on the subject of it, would you like to tell us what it is you have planned to improve that indigenous level of employment? You said that you would go to it as another question.

Mr CARROLL: Yes, all right then.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, if that is okay?

Mr CARROLL: In the department, the figure that I just quoted of 32 out of 500 clearly is not acceptable for a public sector organisation to represent the community in terms of the people it employs. It has been a long-term issue for our department and its predecessors. When DPIFM was established in July 2005, one of our key objectives was to increase the numbers of indigenous people. For a couple of years, we were not very successful at that, and we still are not, as the figures show. However, 12 or 18 months ago, we decided to embark on a program of trainees to get people coming in and training them. We have had two intakes of trainees – one last year and one this year. We wanted to get 15 both years, but we were unable to attract more than nine. However, it has been highly successful and people who are employed by us as trainees get full-time jobs at the end of their training.

As part of my commitment, we have designated 2008 as the year of indigenous achievement and outcome. I cannot report that we have been successful, but I am working very hard to do that. I can report that, on 9 April this year, I wrote to all my senior staff and made a fairly broad definition of senior - I ended up signing 250 individual letters to people asking them to recommit to indigenous employment, and asking them for their ideas. I now have ideas from around, I suspect, 180 to 200 people for a whole range of things we might do in the future to change the outcomes that we are getting.

The real issue for us is that many of our occupations are ones that indigenous people are not qualified in yet. For example, we have geologists, fish pathologists, agronomists and so on. Unfortunately, indigenous people are not in those professions yet. We, of course, have the Earth Science Scholarship in Minerals and Energy, and we are hoping to get the first indigenous geologist in Australia through that program, but we have not yet done that. But, it is one of our stretch targets. We are doing everything we can.

For example, last year during NAIDOC week, on 11 July, we had an open day at Berrimah Farm for indigenous people where we showed, particularly parents and indigenous community people, what we do, demonstrated and did the usual things we do at open days, like show them crocs and all of that sort of stuff. The purpose of that was to make people understand that working in the public sector can be exciting, interesting and challenging. It is not ordinary work, it is not sitting behind a desk in our department all the time, and there are real opportunities for indigenous people if they seek to have them.

Some of our indigenous trainees have done some really quite brilliant work. We have one person in our diagnostic laboratory who was a trainee last year, and we have extended her to do a higher level of certification to become a laboratory assistant, and she is working brilliantly. It is case-by-case work. I have had discussions with Kormilda to see if we can tap into the flow-in from their pupils and, wherever we can, we work through those issues to try to get more people in. However, it is a long, slow process and requires lots of commitment.

I can report to the committee that, in my department at least, there is a great will of people to want to do something. The real difficulty is understanding what we can do that makes a difference and, in resource tight times as they are, it makes it very difficult to get time to do things that make the difference for indigenous people.

Mrs MILLER: There certainly is some responsibility on the companies that operate within the Territory too.

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: I know that GBS Gold have made a commitment to take five trainees per year, with the intention of the outcome being that they would be able to be geologists at the end of that. That is really great, but there needs to be that commitment - does there not - from the big industries that are operating within the Territory. One of the issues to do with indigenous employment in mining is to be in their own location, and that is why the opportunity is there if those companies can actually attract those people.

Mr NATT: Member for Katherine, we are working hard in that area, as part of the Mining Management Plan in future, for mines that do start. McArthur River is a very good example. We have entered into an arrangement with the mine for a Community Benefits Package. That package entails a number of things. One is, obviously, a financial benefit to go back to the community. A huge part of it is a commitment by the company to take on indigenous employment from within that area. I understand that McArthur River Mine is doing that exceptionally well. There are other areas included in that Community Benefits Package. The first one we set up was with McArthur River Mine. It is run by an independent committee so that the money is just not spent all over the place; there is some control over it. There is a commitment from the mining company to do that, and we are trying to work with other mining companies to do the same.

At all of the conversations and the meetings I have with mining companies, they are more than happy to become involved with the local people to try to assist them in some way, shape or form. I do not believe I have ever spoken to someone who is against it. They are committed to the area, they know that they are, obviously, going to receive some sort of benefits from that area, so they would like to give something back. A commitment by some of those companies is assured, which is great for communities around the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: It certainly is. Hopefully, there can be benefits flowing on for indigenous employment, especially to achieve some significant outcomes, and gaining something that will take them to another level. That is something we all have to aim for.

Minister, how are you dealing with, and what issues have come up so far, with the Koongarra uranium deposit? I know there is a significant deposit there, but it is also a contentious issue because it is right next to Kakadu National Park - a definite area of significance. How does that tear the mining industry apart with making a decision as to what is the best thing to do with Koongarra?

Mr NATT: Yes, you are right. Koongarra is of significant interest to a particular French company, Areva. The government has made a commitment that no mining will be undertaken in that area.

Mrs MILLER: I have to say, I am pleased. I am very much all for mining, but that is a significant heritage area of Kakadu and it would be a shame if anything happened there. And you have made that decision on your own but without having to listen to protests, etcetera.

Mr NATT: That is correct.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. McArthur River - you reported on 23 May - and this was in the *Northern Territory News* - that Xstrata would compensate for any damage caused by the expansion of the mine if the federal government overruled the approval to expand the mine. Can you detail what that compensation package is?

Mr NATT: Sorry, can you give me that question again?

Mrs MILLER: Yes. You said that Xstrata would compensate for any damage caused by the expansion at the mine if the federal government overruled the approval to expand the mine. Can you detail what that compensation is, or would be?

Mr NATT: As you know, member for Katherine, any disturbance to the ground within mine sites has to be covered under the Mining Management Plan. That plan has to be put in 12 months prior to the work being done. The assessments made on the work that is going to be undertaken on the land are done and there is a dollar value put on that work to be done, which is placed as a security bond in cash. Currently, that security bond from McArthur River Mine sits at around \$77m. For further details on the expansion, I would like to hand across to Mr Richard Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: I think the quote you are referring to, member for Katherine, refers to an application for an injunction put forward by the NLC on the opening of the river. Part of the Justice's decision in that was

that McArthur River could continue to open the river but, if he found against them at a later date, then McArthur River had to fix up that bit that they were working on. Cost for that, not sure.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. While we are on McArthur River, how is that going now with the expansion?

Mr NATT: I visited there late last year. The expansion is very good. I have witnessed the work undertaken on the river diversion. It is an amazing feat of engineering that the mine has undertaken, to the point where it is 5 km long, up to 17 m deep in some areas. The diversion has involved all the environmental concerns people had with it. Huge boulders, gigantic tree trunks, have been placed in the river bed. The tree trunks have been chained to the boulders so that they do not move when and if the river starts to run. All the banks of the river are currently being vegetated with grasses and native shrubs. So, yes, it is a huge diversion and a wonderful engineering feat. As for the expansion of the mine, now that the court decision has been made they can go ahead. I understand they will go ahead full steam and work within all of their Mining Management Plan and the environmental aspects that have to be undertaken.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it is a huge engineering feat, there is no doubt about that. I have to say that I have not been back to have a look at it in its current state; I had a look at it before it started.

Mr NATT: If you get an opportunity to go and have a look at it, it really is an amazing sight from the air.

Mrs MILLER: Just on that, because I know the environmental requirements were very intense and needed to be. Have all the trees been planted yet? Has all the shrubbery been planted along the edges of that diversion?

Mr NATT: I understand all of the shrubberies and trees have planted along the Barney Creek side of the diversion. For the planting, I will hand that across to Richard Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: I was talking to their environmental manager yesterday and they are undertaking some planting as we speak on the McArthur River, but there is still a component of that to go. They have a nursery there that is using local seeds collected, and are growing the tube stock to do that. The direct seeding of it has been done and has been reported as being successful, but the actual planting of the tube stock is still under way. Just to finish off the statement about Barney Creek, the trials that were undertaken there were very successful.

Mrs MILLER: That is good.

Mr NATT: Can I just add, member for Katherine, we talked about indigenous employment earlier.

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr NATT: Well, one of the ideas of the mine was for the local people to collect local seeds and seedlings of trees and to give some feedback to the mine in that area. They were paid for their services. I understand the nursery is being run by some indigenous employees, so there is a good kickback there as well.

Mrs MILLER: That is good. How many indigenous employees are there at McArthur River?

Mr NATT: I cannot give you a figure off the top of my head, but the last time I spoke to them I reckon they were running at around 15% to 16% of their employment.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr NATT: When we visited, as I said, six months ago, I met probably eight employees who had started that day on traineeships. I also met with two or three - it might have even been four - apprentices who were working in the mechanical shop. They do a lot of fitting and turning, and welding and all of that sort of thing, and they were very happy with the way they have been treated, and are very happy with their jobs. I understand there a number of indigenous guys being trained - we actually went into a simulator of one of the big trucks and had a drive. Richard and I had a go at that - did not do too well, but it is good. Again, they have trained some of these indigenous youths up on some of those aspects of the mining trade.

Mrs MILLER: That is good. Minister, how many people are employed in the Northern Territory in the mining industry, and how many live here and how many fly-in/fly-out?

Mr SELLERS: Member for Katherine, I certainly do not have those figures. It is increasing almost daily with the exploration and drilling companies that are coming in. If the minister likes, we could get you an estimate from the Resources Council and provide that as a question on notice for later.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I would like that.

Question on Notice No 7.1

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

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Madam Deputy Chair. How many people are employed in the mining industry in the Northern Territory? How many are resident NT workers? How many are fly-in/fly-out directly employed workers?

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

Mr NATT: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate the question No 7.1.

Mr NATT: Again, member for Katherine, it is interesting, in speaking to a number of the companies, fly-in/fly-out is a big component of their employment. I know that many of them would like to cut that back as much as they can. However, having the infrastructure and housing and all those sorts of things available, and the workforce, is difficult. I know that, again, in my visits to the mine, a number of people have shifted from interstate into Darwin purely for the fact that the travel time and travel distance is shorter, so it is great for our economy.

Mrs MILLER: Definitely. It is interesting to find out just where people are located who work in our industry. Rare earths at Nolans Bore is yielding rich by-product resources, which is really interesting. What are they?

Mr NATT: It is all the 'ums'. I will hand that to the expert, Mr Richard Sellers. I know there are a lot of 'um' words involved.

Mr SELLERS: I will not bore us by saying 'um' a few times because I would miss some out. Off the top of my head, I cannot list them for you. What I can say about the Nolan's site is that there is a notice of intent that is being placed with the EPA, and the EPA has written back to Arafura with some questions. With the actual upgrade, they do the first stage of testing in the lab, and then they do a higher grade test where they do a bulk sample run-through. That is being tested at the moment. The various minerals involved, sorry, I cannot give them off the top of my head. If we wanted to group them, you have rare earth, phosphate, uranium and calcium chloride as a by-product but, in the rare earths there are several of those and that is where all the 'um' metals are.

Mr NATT: Thorium and those sort of 'um' metals.

Mrs MILLER: In other words, it is quite a very rich source of rare earths and it can be quite valuable in a few areas?

Mr NATT: It is unique really. There are not a lot of rare earths positioned around the world.

Mrs MILLER: There are some near Ceduna.

Mr NATT: Yes, there is. It is a very good deposit and the interest there is high. However, I understand the chemistry of how to extract those minerals from ore bodies from the earth is a different process, so they are working through all those as we speak.

Mrs MILLER: We will not really know the full potential of that until we have it all of extracted, so we will not really know the full potential.

Mr SELLERS: They will know the full potential once they have completed the metallurgical testing in that bulk sampling that they are going through now. That is really just proving that they can extract these rafts of metals out. Just to follow upon the rare earths. The rare earths are a misnomer in the sense that there is a lot of rare earth in the earth's crust, but there are very few places where it is concentrated enough to make it worthwhile to dig out. To build on the minister's comments, what makes the deposits that have been found in Australia and some other parts of the world very interesting at the moment is that, previously, the majority of the rare earths have been produced in China. China is also one of the biggest consumers of it, and there has been a policy shift to use their own rare earths in their own industries, which has the potential of starving some of the other producing nations around the world from these rare earths. Obviously, the rare earths are important in a lot of the new electrical applications - super magnets, batteries that will be required in the future for hybrid cars, those sorts of things. It is a really exciting project.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, INPEX is looking at the harbour. We have found out that the EPA is saying that they will not be commenting on it because they are not going to push their boundary. Who is doing the environmental study to see whether it is a suitable site for INPEX to be located in our harbour?

Mr NATT: This question should have been asked of the Chief Minister because, again, it is classed as a major project. The Chief Minister's Office is working closely with INPEX on all aspects of coming to the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: So, I do not ask the minister for Mines and I do not ask the minister for the Environment, I ask the Chief Minister? Is that right?

Mr NATT: Well, again, the Chief Minister's Office will be working with the appropriate departments on all aspects of INPEX coming to the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: You may have answered this one in your opening statement and I missed it. How many offshore permits have been issued to date and where are they located? You may have answered that. I am sorry if you have.

Mr NATT: A total of 59 exploration permits, 12 retention leases and 10 production licences are administered by the Northern Territory in the offshore Ashmore and Cartier Islands and adjacent waters, and onshore in the Territory. In 2007-08, 15 new offshore and onshore exploration permits were granted. During the period, one new production licence was granted and one exploration permit was granted a retention lease. The administration arrangements for the Greater Sunrise area, which straddles the border between Australia and Timor-Leste, were finalised upon ratification of the Treaty on Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea and the International Utilisation Agreement between the governments of Timor-Leste and Australia. These arrangements clarify the legal and regulatory regimes in the area and allows the proponents to further process this large resource towards development.

The Puffin field, operated by AED Oil, commenced production in October 2007. Six offshore exploration wells were drilled and all encountered hydrocarbons. The worldwide exploration boom has seen oil rig and seismic survey vessels' costs increase drastically. Availability issues have resulted in delays in some of the exploration programs. Work program commitments by industry for 2008-09 includes up to 12 exploration or development wells offshore, compared with eight in 2007-08. The first onshore exploration we mentioned earlier was in Central Australia, which is the first one in 20 years, and that commenced in May 2007. Up to seven more wells are planned for 2008-09 by Central Petroleum. There are no signs of slowing down at this stage and the Territory remains an active providence for oil and gas.

Mrs MILLER: We just want to see some oil spurting out of them.

Mr NATT: That would be nice, wouldn't it? I will ask Mr Sellers to elaborate on anything further.

Mr SELLERS: I thought it might be of interest to the committee to know that the work program commitments for 2008-09 for petroleum will be in excess of \$200m, so it is a decent amount of work. As an example, some of the new companies that are turning up in the system are Petronus of Malaysia, the Thai national oil company, Murphy Oil and CITIC Australia, which is a division of a gigantic Chinese government-owned corporation - so, some very big, new players turning up.

Mrs MILLER: Certainly are. A lot of interest in the Northern Territory.

Mr NATT: Bring it on.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, how many exploration permits for uranium have been issued in the Northern Territory?

Mr NATT: Sorry, member for Katherine, we are trying to hunt it down. There are two approved uranium mining sites in the Territory - that is, Ranger and Jabiluka - and both belong to ERA. As we know, at the moment Jabiluka is not operational. Uranium mining is regulated by the department under a memorandum of understanding with the Commonwealth government. There is a requirement for the Commonwealth minister to be consulted by the department on any approval related to mining of uranium. The Office of the Supervising Scientist provides technical advice to the Commonwealth on the environmental performance of uranium mining activities. We, the Northern Territory, have responsibility for the management and oversight of the operations at the Ranger mine, but must consult the Office of the Supervising Scientist and the Northern Land Council before accepting a change in operations at the mine.

Currently, there are 43 exploration projects where uranium is one of the targeted minerals. I do not actually specifically issue exploration licences for uranium, I just issue exploration licences. So, currently, we know that there are 43 exploration projects where uranium is a targeted mineral.

Mrs MILLER: Where do the uranium royalties go?

Mr NATT: They go to the Commonwealth government.

Mrs MILLER: All of them?

Mr NATT: I understand they do, yes. The Commonwealth owns the uranium.

Mrs MILLER: There is a lot of money coming into the Territory, and a lot of money, obviously, will be fleeing from the Territory. Minister, how much has the government spent since 2001 to attract mining companies to invest in the Territory? Can you give me how much has government invested year-by-year?

Mr NATT: Since 2001?

Mrs MILLER: Since 2001.

Mr NATT: I know we have had a couple of them. We have had the *Building the Territory Resource Base*, which was \$15m over four years. Currently, we are in the *Bringing Forward Discovery* program, which is \$14.4m over four years.

Mrs MILLER: If you have the final details, are you able to provide that?

Mr NATT: I am pretty sure we might be able to have that now.

Mr CARROLL: The question is a very broad one, member for Katherine. It will help us if we can get some definition about what specifically you are after.

Mrs MILLER: I just realised it probably was too broad, because it is saying, your employment etcetera. So, what targeted projects have you invested in since 2001 to attract mining industries and mining companies to the Territory - specific projects?

Mr NATT: We will be happy to get those figures for you.

Question on Notice No 7.2.

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

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what specific projects, programs and marketing has government done since 2001 to attract mining companies to invest in the Northern Territory, year-by-year? Is that specific?

Mr SELLERS: We can tell you about the detail of the project, but I think you just wanted the costs?

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

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

Mr NATT: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 7.2.

Mr NATT: It is interesting to note that, since 2001, the Fraser Institute survey, which is a very good indicator for mining jurisdictions around the world, shows that we have increased our ranking in Australia from sixth to third in 2006-07, which shows the work being undertaken within the department is really benefiting the Northern Territory. I do not know whether you happened to notice but, in the *Business Review Weekly*, there were some wonderful articles on the Northern Territory. Specifically, there was one on mining. Comments made by some big players in the Northern Territory were of note. Michael Keenan, who we all know is a huge name in Australian mining, said the Northern Territory is an easier place to do business than his home state of Western Australia. The government here, he said, recognises that mining will benefit their gross state product and that it permeates through all the departments. To have comments like that in publications like *Business Review Weekly* just shows that we are doing something right.

That stand is also supported by Compass Resources Managing Director, Richard Swann, who has been working closely with the government over the last couple of years in the Compass Resources deposit at Batchelor. He also supports Michael Keenan's comments by saying that the government is great to work with, and there are not too many obstacles put in their way to ensure mining does benefit the Northern Territory into the future.

Mrs MILLER: I should hope not, minister. There should not be any obstacles put in their way, the way they contribute to the GST, that is for sure. You have the prime ministerial appointment in government, because it is a good news story. Member for Nelson, I am going to leave the floor to you for a while.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, member for Katherine. I must admit that I did not quite agree with everything that you last said. Especially in relation to just because Western Australia may have put in some clauses, some companies may think it is better to mine here. In relation to LNG, where Western Australia required some reserve of that gas, one could argue they have the right mix and we may not. However, I digress.

Mr NATT: I was quoting from *Business Review Weekly* on Michael Keenan's comments, member for Nelson.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Nelson, can I reiterate that we are actually working on Outputs 1.1 and 2.1, the two mining areas.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, this is a fairly broad question. We spoke about the Sunrise gas field. Are we doing any work with the East Timorese government in relation to developing any of their resources as a cooperative approach from our government to their government?

Mr NATT: I understand that is being done through Commonwealth agencies. For more information, I will hand it to Richard Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, I was actually talking to John Hartwell, the Chief Executive Officer of the DITR component that deals with that. He has recently returned from East Timor. They were in negotiations on Greater Sunrise, but they are also talking with the East Timorese on a number of other projects. He explained some of those to me over a meal the other day, but it is the Commonwealth that is doing it.

Mr WOOD: Do you see a role, perhaps, with the Territory government helping East Timor in development of some of its resources because of our proximity to East Timor?

Mr NATT: It is fair to say that this government has always been open to help Timor-Leste. I know, in other departments, we have been working closely with them and some of their issues. In the fishing area, for example, we have done some work with them. It is probably a question you need to ask of the Chief Minister. From our point of view, we are one of those governments where we try to assist where we can. That has been proven in the cattle industry with Sabah, Vietnam and Indonesia. I am sure the Chief Minister would be open to assist where he could - not putting words in the Chief Minister's mouth, though.

Mr WOOD: The minister should be able to at least give an opinion on that. It is outside of a Cabinet opinion. It would be nice to hear your opinion on some of these matters.

Mr NATT: We have a very close relationship with Timor-Leste. That has been proven lately with some unfortunate incidents that have happened over there. Darwin has strong links through some of its people and its proximity to Timor-Leste, so I feel sure that that assistance would be offered if required.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I have another fairly broad question. The mining industry, naturally, relies on a large amount of energy for it to operate and to be competitive, whether it be transport or just producing the mineral part of its process. Most of that would be done by diesel. A lot of the vehicles would be heavy vehicles, whether it be trucks or machinery.

It just so happens, in today's paper, that Kenworth has the high tech jolly green giant. Kenworth, which makes many of the trucks that haul a lot of our minerals, has just unveiled that. Under its big green bonnet sits a Cummins Westport 15 litre ISX liquefied natural gas (LNG) engine, similar to that being tested in several countries around the world. The green engine employs high pressure direct injection system to run almost entirely on LNG, reducing greenhouse gases by more than 20% compared to the equivalent diesel engine, and reducing particulate matter by 60%. The Cummins Westport gets 90% of its fuel energy from LNG on a typical heavy truck application, reducing greenhouse gas emissions to about 7000 tonnes for a heavy duty truck in over 200 000 km a year. It also says that the operator benefits from a reduction in fuel consumption compared with a diesel engine.

Minister, I am not sure if this is a Cabinet decision, but I would be interested in your opinion of whether you would be willing, within your government, to push the possibility of the Territory using some of the LNG that may come to Darwin to be used as a beneficial energy source for the mining industry to reduce costs and make it competitive?

Mr NATT: It is fair to say that all mining companies - again, we met with ERA recently and they are very concerned about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. I think you will find that all mining companies are responsible in looking after the environment and the wellbeing of the land they are mining. At the end of the day, it is an operational decision that they have to make. I would be only too supportive of those changes, because I am a great one for looking after our environment. I am happy, if mining companies want to go down that avenue, to support the decisions they make.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I was also looking at the cost aspect, because diesel is getting dearer, which means our industry is getting less competitive, as with all industries. If we are able to use a source of energy that is going to be delivered to the Territory, even if most of it is going to be exported, would you encourage our government to look at some retention of that energy source to ensure that our Northern Territory industries can have an edge over other parts of the world or Australia?

Mr NATT: Again, our government is supportive of all those initiatives. I am not sure where you are heading with the question, member for Nelson, but the government is always supportive. As you know, the Chief Minister's Department has just put out a climate change information booklet and is looking for feedback on that. If there was a possibility that the LNG gas could be made available to mining companies, well, I would support it.

Mr WOOD: That is where I was heading; it was nothing secretive. I note that Wesfarmers in Western Australia, who I have been in contact with, have said I can come down and have a look at the distribution point for LNG, where they are doing the same thing. So, Western Australia is already looking at providing LNG. Let us not get left behind in the changes, let us move along.

Mr NATT: I will just go back on what I said a minute ago, member for Nelson, that all responsible companies are looking at alternative methods now, moving away from oil-based fuels. It is a cheaper option for them; the economics prove all that. The fact it is going to help the greenhouse gas emission process is probably the only way to go.

Mr WOOD: You mentioned mine management plans. There has been a lot of talk about the availability of mine management plans for the public, and there was some discussion about the possibility of that occurring as long as some of the commercial-in-confidence material is taken out. How far has that progressed?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to Mr Richard Sellers. He knows all the intricacies of it.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, when we talked on this at the last estimates, the topic was around McArthur River. The people who were seeking that mining management plan did it through the FOI, and

they were able to access it with some commercial-in-confidence information taken out, as you correctly state.

To bring it into the context of today, every mine or other major development that goes through a public environmental impact statement process has the processes and things described, and there is, obviously, an opportunity for everyone to comment on it at that stage. Currently, the mine management plans are at the same stage as they were last year.

The Resources Council has reformed since Christmas time. I have met with the Chief Executive Officer of that and put it on the list of things that I would like to work through with the Minerals Council. It was not successfully worked through in the previous 12 months, and we will have to take it up and talk it through again with them. Anyone who has a raging desire to see one, obviously, has the freedom of information process to go through, and that has a cost with it.

That being said, there are other companies that are freely making their mine management plans available to people who are interested. Vista Gold, the people who are managing Mt Todd, at their last meeting with the community interest group that we run made their mine management plan available to AFANT and other interested parties. That sentiment is expressed by a few of the mining companies but, as a general outcome, no, there is not one yet, but it is on the list of things to talk through with the new Resources Council.

Mr WOOD: As a point of clarification, is the new Resources Council taking over from the NT Minerals Council?

Mr NATT: That is right. The old NT Minerals Council has been restructured and reconstituted to the Resources Council of the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: No good me ringing up the NT Minerals Council anymore?

Mr NATT: No.

Mr SELLERS: You would probably get them.

Mr NATT: They have just re-badged.

Mr SELLERS: At the moment, I understand they are in the same offices, member for Nelson, but they are in the process of moving to new offices in town. You will probably get them on the same number.

Mr WOOD: You raised an issue which I was going to ask, minister. Can I get an update on the rehabilitation of Mt Todd, and an idea of where Vista Gold is heading at the present time?

Mr NATT: Basically, on the planning side of Mt Todd, the Northern Territory government announced that there would be \$630 000 for the 2007-08 period towards the blueprint rehabilitation strategy for the site; \$50 000 of that for the third party review of an independent expert on the proposed work and an updated environmental risk assessment; and the remainder, the \$580 000, for the development of the rehabilitation plan and the site environmental monitoring activities.

Stage 1 of the final draft report was delivered in January this year. The key information provided by the project included an environmental status report and a review of the legislative obligations related to the Territory government; an environmental risk assessment for the site and categorisation of the knowledge gaps; the generation of a framework to assess the requirements of the site rehabilitation; and the provision of detailed project plans to address the rehabilitation requirements of the site.

The procurement process, which was Stage 2, is currently under way. The project intent for Stage 2 process includes an installation of environmental gauging stations and monitoring equipment on the site; on-the-ground site condition assessment of site materials to provide key information for determining the waste management action plan; the determination of the availability of suitable materials for the rehabilitation process; specialised environmental and spatial data management to provide accurate, assessable information to regulators and stakeholders; the provision of high resolution aerial survey data; and the last one was to fully cost a decommissioning plan for the site to inform the actions and define the financial liability for the rehabilitation of the site.

As for Vista Gold, which you mentioned, as per its agreement with the Northern Territory government, it took over the management of the site in January 2007. It has a mining management plan that covers the

daily maintenance of the site, as well as its exploration drilling program. Vista Gold has been managing the site as per its arrangements and within the mining management plan and, should Vista Gold decide to start mining, it will take over the full responsibility of the rehabilitation of the site. The company is continuing with extensive exploration programs to define ore bodies in and around the existing pit. They meet regularly with the Mt Todd reference group and provide copies of letters of interest that may be required by the committee members.

As you know, we have inherited this mess from the CLP. It has been a legacy left to the ...

Mrs MILLER: You could not resist it.

Mr NATT: No, have it written.

Mrs MILLER: You could not go through a whole day without saying it.

Mr NATT: We have used millions of dollars of taxpayers' money to control the management of the site, which is unfortunate. Basically, that is where it sits with Vista Gold. Mr Richard Sellers would like to add some more information.

Mr SELLERS: Just to give you a bit of an idea about how Vista Gold has been going with its exploration. They put out a JORC-compliant resource estimate of 3.6 million ounces of gold adjacent to Batman pit, and they are continuing to drill that resource out. In discussions with Mr Carroll and me, Vista Gold executives are very keen and said they are pleased with the way they are progressing. In the management of the site, the site is certainly the best I have seen it since I have been involved with Mt Todd. Vista Gold actually go beyond the agreement this year; they are putting in a lime treatment plant to treat some of the polluted water in Batman pit and to reduce the risk of environmental overflow during the Wet Season. That plant is being put in by an amendment to the mining management plan as we speak and will be operational a little later this Dry Season.

The suite of works that we are doing for the \$630 000 is to keep with the obligation of making sure that, if Vista Gold say no, we know what to do to pick up and keep on going. But, of course, our great hope is that Vista Gold continue to be successful with their exploration and move it forward.

Mr NATT: It is probably fair to say that, as a result of this inheritance, we have actually instigated the 100% security bonds for all mining sites - that was a decision made by this government.

Mr WOOD: I appreciate that things certainly have to improve; it has been a disaster. It was mentioned in years gone by that it would cost around \$20m. Your CEO is shaking his head. I thought I heard a figure of about \$20m would be required for rehabilitation. That is wrong. What was the money that the government thought would be required for rehabilitation? How much have they spent so far in rehabilitating that site?

Mr NATT: I hand that to my CEO, he knows the background.

Mr CARROLL: Member for Nelson, I was shaking my head because I have heard other figures higher than that, and I do not think anybody knows what the cost of rehabilitating Mt Todd is, at this time. The actual cost of rehabilitation will depend on the work to be undertaken. That is why we are doing the studies at the moment, that the minister and Mr Sellers have just referred to, so that we can have a plan for what the government might do in the event that the government has to deal with it. If the government does not have to deal with it, the responsibility will be for Vista Gold, as part of its mining activities, to undertake the rehabilitation process.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Maybe that figure was a political figure at the time, because there was a lot of debate about this. So, I accept that maybe ...

Mr NATT: I must admit, I heard higher as well. But, as Mr Carroll said, based on the progress report we are going to get, it will give us an idea of what dollars will be spent in the coming years if Vista Gold do not take on the project.

Mr WOOD: You mentioned decommissioning in your response. What was that in relation to? I did not understand what that was referring to.

Mr CARROLL: Minister, if I may. That refers to in the event that the mining does not go ahead and the site is not fully rehabilitated, there are activities at the site now that need to be decommissioned. So, that

refers to a fully-costed plan for all the stuff that has to happen on the site in the event that mining does not happen. I should say, member for Nelson, we are working very hard, including doing all we can to keep the price of gold up. We intervene in the appropriate places every day to ensure that gold stays up so the cost of mining can be covered by the price of gold.

Mr WOOD: It sounds like something we should all encourage then.

Mr CARROLL: I encourage you to do the same, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I took a trip to Mt Todd under the previous minister. There was a large freshwater lake to the north of the mine. There was some talk that there may be options to use that as a recreational lake. Have those sort of options now disappeared because Vista Gold are there, or are they still an option that they can be developed?

Mr NATT: My first thoughts would be that it is currently a mining site. Vista Gold has the mining management plan and are undertaking exploration activities in that area. We have all our fingers and toes crossed that Vista Gold will, in agreement with the Northern Territory government, take that on. So, at this stage, it is a mining site. I will hand that over to Mr Richard Sellers to elaborate.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, that has been an aspiration of the Jawoyn people, as far as I understand, from day one. I know that they have been in constant discussions with Vista on it. Vista have not completely ruled it out, but we are not privy to the discussion that is happening between Vista and Jawoyn.

Mr WOOD: Okay, thank you. The member for Katherine has asked some of my questions. I have been informed that there is a large phosphate deposit in the Barkly, not far off the Barkly Highway. Could you give us some information on what size that deposit is, which company is involved in developing that prospect, and when do we think it will be up and running?

Mr NATT: I understand Minemakers is the company that has the deposit. I met with one of the directors of that company in Perth last year. He explained to me the extent of the deposit. He was a little unhappy at the time because the price of phosphate was down, but I understand phosphate has now gone through the roof. For more details, I will hand that across to Mr Richard Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: The historic numbers were around 72 million tonnes at a certain grade of phosphate. The historic drilling has been brought into question and there is more drilling required before they will come up with a compliant resource. It is understood that there is a lot more phosphate there at a lower grade, and Minemakers are certainly well across the work they need to do to bring it up to a compliant resource.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I know you will say that it is something outside your portfolio but, if this was to be developed and the Barkly is the only single means of transporting material out of there, some parts of the Barkly are not in particularly good shape, especially towards the Queensland border side. Has there been any discussion or thought about bringing the rail through?

Mr NATT: I understand that the company has spoken with the local member of the area, and he has been active in seeking some information. I guess it is fair to say that no decisions can be made in that area until the site is actually proved up, commitments are made, and the extent of the operations is known. When all those figures and facts are realised, I am sure decisions will be made on whether that extension of the railway can be undertaken.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I thought maybe some preliminary discussions, so we have a plan ahead of the development - not like Glyde Point.

Mr NATT: We are always trying to plan ahead. It is fair to say that, if and when this deposit is proven up and something does happen out there, it is will probably be at least six to eight years before mining will commence. Mr Sellers?

Mr SELLERS: Certainly, it will take some time. I am unaware of the actual time frame, but the minister is right; it will be several years in the planning. If they were going to mine it, or get a mining approval and mine at a lower level, they might consider some trucking options until they have any large bulk transport facility up and under way. It is very early stages. Certainly, it is one that we are keen to work with and try to make happen.

Mr WOOD: Minister, in your annual report, you mentioned a new geoscientific report covering uranium in the Northern Territory. Were there any highlights in that report?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to Mr Sellers, who is aware of all the details.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, the report has been out and available publicly for some time now. It goes through the uranium prospects and prospectivity in the Territory from a geology background. We can make one of the reports available for you.

Mr WOOD: I have another question on your *Bringing Forward Discovery* report. There is \$2.75m for pre-competitive geoscience programs. Can I get an explanation of what that actually means?

Mr NATT: I will hand over to Mr Richard Sellers to elaborate on that. A lot of geoscience information has to be gathered to supply to mining companies, but I am sure Mr Sellers will be able to elaborate for you.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, it covers such things as production of basic geological map material that companies can access, then it goes through a series of other mapping techniques based on some scientific methods to show the type of rocks that are found under cover. The main focus of this current survey is to increase our coverage of gravity data across the Territory. The first major gravity survey is under way near Alice Springs at the moment. From memory, that is around \$3m-worth of work. Just to give you an idea of how that actually happens, they have some very specialised gravity sensors mounted on a helicopter that lands, and a set grid pattern, 400 m-odd apart for some of it and wider for others, over areas of interest. That is then interpreted by geophysicists over a period of time and they produce maps that are then made freely available to people who want to come and explore in the Territory. So, the pre-competitive geoscientific data is basically all the data sets that have been put together by the geological surveys and their predecessors, that are made available to companies at no cost so that it becomes a bit easier for them to target where they are going to look in the Territory, and they do not have to undertake the extensive costs for some of these surveys themselves.

On the gravity data and some drilling, another part of the initiative that the minister touched on earlier was \$2.4m over three years - \$800 000 a year over three years. Where a company is already undertaking a little gravity work, for example, or a drilling activity, but they would not normally go into another area that we think is of interest to wider groups, then we can join up with some of these in partnerships or collaborations and actually get a little more bang for the Territory's buck while they put in a bit for some gravity surveys or a drilling activity. People apply for that funding. The first one of those will start sometime after July.

Mr WOOD: Minister, one of my favourite topics is geothermal energy sources. Where is the legislation?

Mr NATT: The legislation is currently before the Parliamentary Counsel. We are hoping that that will be up before the end of the year.

Mr WOOD: What has happened to the public discussion paper? You have the feedback from the public; has that all been included in the draft legislation?

Mr NATT: I understand it has been, yes.

Mr WOOD: Another area that I have an interest in - and I do not know whether your department would be interested in at least looking at it as a possibility for a future renewable energy source - is solar hydrogen. I visited the University of New South Wales two weeks ago to see some experimental work that has been done at the university using sunlight, titanium oxide and saltwater. It does not have to be saltwater, but they are using saltwater as it is a source you have plenty of. I would be the first to say that, perhaps, that technology has a fair way to go. However, what that technology is capable of doing is, simply by using the sun, you can produce hydrogen from water. At the present time, it is quite inefficient. I found out, as I struggled through my chemistry, that titanium oxide needs to be defective for this to actually happen, so, the more defective titanium oxide is, the more efficient it is in actually breaking up the hydrogen from the water.

It potentially has a means of producing hydrogen from a greenhouse gas clean source, the sun, which would enable people who might have cattle stations, or especially remote communities, to actually produce hydrogen, because they could run their vehicles and run their house of it, which is better than just solar where you have to rely on batteries or diesel back-up. I am not saying that this is ready to go, but I wonder whether the minister would be at least interested in seeing whether the Northern Territory government

could, in cooperation with the University of New South Wales, perhaps investigate the possibilities of this being a source of energy for the Northern Territory, and even possibly look at a pilot plant or put some money into helping this particular program?

Mr NATT: Well, thank you for the science lesson, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: I did my best, it was 38 years ago.

Mr NATT: It is an interesting aspect and I am pleased to see that there is a lot of experimentation, for the want of a better word, being done in other areas to assist our climate. I will handball this one, because I am not the scientist in this field. I hand it to Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: My science in this particular area is a little rusty as well. Certainly, production of hydrogen, whether it be for direct use in an engine or in a fuel cell, is a very interesting aspect of renewable energy. You may recall from previous estimates that we, on behalf of the federal government, operate a remote renewable program that looks at hybrid systems for places like stations or outstations, or even larger things like the Hermannsburg solar arrays. What I am pleased to say is that the technology is increasing very fast. As soon as the technology is proven it can be used in that process. I guess a simple answer is, yes, we are interested in any new technology and the group that looks after that will be more across it than I am today.

Mr WOOD: I hope that the minister investigates that. I am not the scientist either, but anything is worth looking at.

Mr NATT: Look, I agree with you. I am pleased to say that the Mining division in my department is up to speed with a lot of things that are happening around the country, and they have their finger on the pulse. As Mr Sellers said, I am sure the people involved in the department who come under that area would be looking at all aspects of it. Let us hope that it does prove worthwhile in the future.

Mr WOOD: This question is a crossover question. Biofuels: I am interested to know what your opinion is on the production of biofuels in the Territory. Obviously, it is a clean form of energy when it is burnt, but it requires energy to actually produce it. It also requires land and crops that could possibly be used for food. I am interested to know what the policy of the government or your department is in relation to whether we should be using crops that would normally be used for food in a process which would enable that crop to be used for an energy source for vehicles?

Mr NATT: Member for Nelson, we have gone from mining to crops, and I am wondering whether this output could be closed here or ...

Mr WOOD: Well, it comes under energy, which still comes under you - you have an energy policy. Well, biofuels ...

Mr NATT: But you are asking specifically about crops.

Mr WOOD: Yes, this is why too, it is a crossover question, it is an energy question, which is this side of it, and it is produced by a crop. You handle both portfolios; this is a sub-portfolio, if I can call it that. So, I can either put it in to the Primary Industry, but it will not be in as Energy, it will be in as a crop, or I can put it in Energy, which is in Mines and minerals. I can cut it in half if you would like me to. I just ask you the question, which is, basically: do you support biofuels and what are your concerns about the issues?

Mr NATT: I support any effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and biofuels are going to play a major role in that in the future. There are still a lot of unknowns in a number of areas. We will continue to work with the producers and with industry in the hope that, one day, it will become a successful field for fuel supply. Does that answer the question?

Mr WOOD: Would your government be looking at subsidising growers who take on growing crops for biofuels and developing that as an industry? I believe it is done in other parts of the world.

Mr NATT: Again, I think that is a Primary Industry question. It is something that will have to be put forward to the government in the future.

Mr WOOD: I do reckon it is 50:50, it is energy and primary industry. You cannot have one without the other in this case. I will move on then, minister.

In relation to solar energy, you showed some tables in your annual report showing how much CO₂ is saved, but have you done anything that shows a whole of process? In other words, to produce the solar panels, how much CO₂ is used? To transport the solar panels, how much CO₂ is used? It is easy to say that your energy source is going to have very little CO₂ emissions but, in the production of that energy source, it may be negated because it is going to produce a loss of CO₂ emissions. Has the department done anything in relation to looking at whether it is neutral when it comes to CO₂ emissions?

Mr NATT: We have been very active trying to encourage pastoral properties, communities and whatever, to move across to solar power. We are having some success. To elaborate on that, I will ask Mr Sellers to give us some more information.

Mr SELLERS: The basic parameters used for the remote renewable programs are based on the economies of what is happening. For example, on a pastoral property, the interests of the pastoralist is more, 'Will it be cheaper than me using diesel?' I personally have not done the calculations. I know there are a series of calculations that have been done by a lot of people who are interested at different levels, on the batteries, for example, and other things. But no, as far as I know, within our department we have not done that particular activity.

Mr WOOD: Could I say then, minister, that, when you put up a table which basically talks about the expected savings ...

Mr NATT: Sorry, member for Nelson, can I just ask where that table is?

Mr WOOD: At page 77 of the annual report. It talks about the number of pastoral stations. It is to do with the rebates, but it does say that expected savings per annum, for instance, in the case of pastoral stations, 154 000 litres of fuel; the expected savings per annum of greenhouse gases is 416 tonnes of CO₂. I am not against using solar energy by any means; however, the problem I have is out there in the wide world today where it says: 'This is what we will save by using solar because we will not be using diesel'. The thing is, we really have to be honest with ourselves and say: 'Well, what did it cost in CO₂ emissions to produce this piece of equipment – the aluminium frame, the silicone, the transport?' This is an argument sometimes used about whether we have a nuclear power station, because the cost of actually building it emits so much CO₂.

Surely, a similar principle should be applied to, when we say to the community or pastoral stations, if you put this in, not only will you save dollars from not having to use diesel. We really need an honest figure to say what they will save in CO₂. Now, it might be what they save in CO₂, because that is what the diesel would have let off, but how much did it cost to produce the equipment to get that saving? It is a reasonable question and I do not know whether the government could come up with figures to show us how it works in totality.

Mr NATT: It is a good question and I understand your concern. It is something that, if we are going to extend this further down the track, we would probably have to talk to the manufacturers of the cells and the panels to find out the appropriate information from them. We would have to collate the information on how much diesel is burned and what CO₂ emissions are involved. It is going to be a big study but it is something we will take on board. I will ask Mr Sellers to elaborate.

Mr SELLERS: In the first instance, we will make sure the heading is a bit clearer in the table. It says 'expected savings'. It clearly relates to the diesel fuel burning. We will make sure that table is a bit clearer for you next year. I understand the issue you are raising; it is a wider one that is discussed broadly in a number of areas across Australia. It is one we are interested in. I will ask my staff to have a look at it for you. That is a good question.

Mr WOOD: I realise the cheap way would be just to change the column, but the more expensive way is to come up with figures that are realistic.

Mr SELLERS: I believe it is a good question. It is one we will look in to. I cannot guarantee exactly which way we will go yet.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, it mentions in the annual report about the NT Energy Policy. Has that been completed?

Mr NATT: I understand it has been completed, or is near completion. I will hand that to Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, there is a draft of the Energy Policy. We are holding on to it while the greenhouse policies and other things are settled. Even though it has had a lot of work done on it, it would seem silly to bring it forward prematurely with the other wider issues that have been brought up by the current Commonwealth government that may have an effect on the policy and bring forward something we then immediately have to change. So, we will delay, probably a month or two, before we bring it forward.

Mr WOOD: It could even include solar energy, couldn't it?

Mr SELLERS: It certainly does.

Mr WOOD: Minister, under your priorities for 2007-08, it just said 'Fuel Emergency Management'. What does that actually mean?

Mr NATT: I will put that to Mr Sellers.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, one of the hats I wear is the Chair of FEAC, the acronym that you just explained. Basically, if there is a fuel emergency in Australia, for some reason there is a sudden halt of supply of oil or gas in Australia, there is a national group that looks at what the effects of that is around the jurisdictions. The group that I chair looks at what we have in the Territory, what is available and what it might be used for, and reports back to that group. There was actually a simulation exercise earlier this week on this, where the federal government put out a hypothetical of a certain percentage loss in fuel production available for Australia for four or five months and what would that mean.

The powers that are under the FEAC group are to make recommendations to government, if needed, to focus the fuel that is available for emergency services. It is the group that makes recommendations such as if there is not enough fuel to only allow it through certain service stations, and regulate cars to fill up every second or third day - those sorts of things that you saw in fuel shops back in the 1970s. This group determines that for the Territory and feeds into any emergency situation that occurs for the federation.

The group itself is made up of all the main suppliers, transporters and operators - the Vopaks etcetera of the world - as well as the government departments that deal with emergency incidents, such as the Fire, the Police and Chief Minister's. That group has a network of information provision that allows them to make those decisions if something occurs.

Mr WOOD: We have already just had a major emergency in Western Australia. Would this group ...

Mr SELLERS: A similar group in Western Australia will be operating on that, yes.

Mr WOOD: I may be going outside the realm of the minister, but did it work in Western Australia?

Mr SELLERS: Well, this is Richard Sellers' point of view. It is a speculation in the sense that the equivalent of FEAC would have worked fine. The issue that is created by 30% of your energy not being available is a very large issue, and it is one that politicians are struggling to manage. Obviously, it drags in a lot of industry and other things. I suspect the process of how it was dealt with within government would have gone very smoothly. The issue itself is a very large one and creates all sorts of ramifications.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is there a lesson to be learnt that we, perhaps, do not allow all our eggs in one basket? In other words, our energy sources are diversified. Presently, I suppose, we just have gas for electricity and petrol and oil for cars. I mentioned LNG before, and there might be compressed natural gas and there might be other forms. In the case of trying to reduce the risk of a major emergency occurring, has the government considered trying to diversify energy supplies in case of that happening?

Mr NATT: My understanding is that we have a diversification or back-up such that, if there was an emergency such as that, we can go to diesel burning. Also, I understand there is a back up from ConocoPhillips. For more information on that, you would probably need to ask Power and Water tomorrow morning.

Mr WOOD: My last question in this area relates to fossicking. I know you have been asked this before, but could you perhaps explain to me, who is not a fossicker, the difference between how you can fossick in Western Australia and how you can fossick in the Northern Territory, and why are some people not happy with the way it is done in the Territory?

Mr NATT: The Northern Territory Prospectors and Detectors Association are lobbying the government, as you know, at the moment, to introduce a process similar to what is in Western Australia. It is called a section 20A, and that will access land for prospecting and detecting. The section 20A process in Western Australia allows the government to issue access for a prescribed period of three months to prospectors on Crown land. This removes the need for prospectors to negotiate access on to pastoral land or exploration licences, and places that responsibility on the government.

We have had a close look at this after a meeting with Mr McMahon. I have met with him on one occasion with a couple of his representatives and the department has met on two, maybe three, occasions with him. The department has looked at it closely, spoken to the Western Australian government, and we feel that substantial costs will be incurred by the government to undertake this process.

The association members can undertake the same activity, and all they need to do is seek permission from pastoralists and exploration licence holders before entering their land. We really need to get a fair balance between the pastoral owners, the mining lease holders and the fossickers. I know the department has met with the association. We have several fossicking areas labelled as we speak. They have been there for a number of years. I know that the department is actually looking at opening up other areas as well. For more information, I know Mr Sellers has met with Mr McMahon and his representatives on a couple of occasions. Mr Sellers would, perhaps, like to elaborate a little bit more.

Mr SELLERS: Member for Nelson, just a couple of things. I think the original question was, what the difference in Western Australia is, which is, you pay and the government actually directs access to Crown land. There is a process of objection from the pastoral owners and exploration leaseholders, but it is the government's decision that these people can go on for three months.

The difference in the Territory is that, if I wanted to do it, I would go and approach the pastoralist and say: 'Can I operate on your land?' The second difference is, it is free in the Territory. Our statistics for the fossicking permits show that, over the years, depending on the year, there is a number between 500 and 1000 free fossicking permits issued a year. As the minister mentioned, fossicking areas are open and the association that the minister mentioned - you might have met with as well - have approached us and said: 'Here are some more areas we would like you to consider for prospecting and fossicking'. We are going through that process of looking to open those up for them as well.

The main difference is, in Western Australia the government takes away the right to say 'no' after an objection process with pastoralists and the exploration leaseholders.

Mr WOOD: What is the opinion of the Cattlemen's Association in relation to fossicking? Have they been approached in reference to whether they would support it or not?

Mr SELLERS: Sorry, member for Nelson, are you saying that I would approach ...

Mr WOOD: I gather part of the sticking point is that in Western Australia the government has the power to override the pastoralists' objections to those people coming on to their property. Here, a pastoralist could say 'no'. I just want to know if all pastoralists against fossicking on their property? Do they have a view? Have they been part of the negotiations with yourselves?

Mr SELLERS: No, I have personally talked to a number of pastoralists on it. I did mention the issue with Mr Kenney before he left the position. Certainly, we have recommended to the association that they meet with the cattlemen and have a discussion.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. That is all my questions.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, with your indulgence, the member for Katherine has requested that we do some Non-output Specific Budget-Related Questions just on the Minerals and Energy portfolio.

Mrs MILLER: It is actually for the whole department, for all of them.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will leave that to the end then.

Mr MILLS: Minister, you made reference to the uranium royalties going to the Commonwealth. Are you able to say how much flows from the Territory through uranium royalties to the Commonwealth?

Mr NATT: No, I am unaware of that figure. Again, that would be a Treasury question.

Mr MILLS: The last one is the gas disruption in Western Australia. News reports in the last 24 hours have indicated that this will have national consequences economically. I wonder whether, first, we are going to be involved at this FEAC level soon in working through the response as it may affect the Territory?

Mr NATT: Is that the question? Sorry, member for Blain. I will hand that to Mr Sellers, who is a member of that committee.

Mr SELLERS: The discussions in the paper are at an economic level and, so, FEAC does not have a role in that. The specific role of FEAC is the distribution and sensible use of fuel in an emergency situation. The economic discussion is a separate discussion, but very important for Australia as a whole.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, I understand that. Therefore, if it goes then to gas exploration, do you predict that this disruption in the north of Western Australia will have some influence on exploration and activities in our own region? For example, do you think it may alter INPEX's consideration of the Territory versus Western Australia?

Mr NATT: You were talking about exploration?

Mr MILLS: Yes, being ...

Mr NATT: INPEX are not exploring in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I understand that. Do you think this event is going to exert any influence on the viability of the Territory as a destination for gas onshore?

Mr NATT: My own personal opinion is that I do not believe it will. It is a matter of ensuring that the company that sets up, if and when INPEX does come to the Territory, would have to undertake all of their occupational health and safety measures, and all of their safety requirements to ensure that those sort of things do not happen. I cannot see how the accident that has happened in Western Australia would have any bearing or any impact on INPEX coming to our shores.

Mr MILLS: One way or another?

Mr NATT: I have my doubts. Again, I am not wishing to pass the buck here, member for Blain, but it is a major project of the Chief Minister's Office now, and those sort of questions should have gone to the Chief Minister's portfolio.

Mr MILLS: I am just wondering at what level is your department involved with strategic policy formation in regard to contemporary issues in this industry? The next one is Sunrise. Are you able to give us an update on where the situation rests with Sunrise, with the increased demand for gas, with Woodside having signed a deal with PetroChina in Taiwan? Obviously, there is an increased demand for gas, particularly for Woodside, who have done a fair bit of work in Sunrise. Can you give us an update of any activities in the Sunrise area?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to my Chief Executive Officer.

Mr CARROLL: Member for Blain, the Sunrise negotiations are conducted by the Commonwealth, because they are in Commonwealth waters. I have not had a recent update, but my understanding is that the Commonwealth is actively working with Timor-Leste in getting that area developed. It is still a Commonwealth negotiation and the Territory government is not involved in those negotiations.

Mr MILLS: I understand that it is working on three fronts: one Timor-Leste, one the floating platform and one the possibility of coming onshore at ConocoPhillips. How does the Territory get involved in these discussions, or get advised or briefed and, secondly - I am assuming that it does occur - when was the last briefing on this matter that was provided to the Territory government?

Mr CARROLL: The negotiations on all of that are done through the Chief Minister's Department. I am aware that the Chief Minister's Department is kept up-to-date from time to time on these issues. However, because I am not across the detail, I cannot give you dates, times and the status of negotiations.

Mr MILLS: I can understand the high-level strategic position taken by the Chief Minister but, surely, does it not filter down? Just as there is a connection between Commonwealth negotiations and the

Territory, and the Chief Minister in that case, would there not then be a connection between that briefing, that information then flowing directly to the department?

Mr CARROLL: The short answer to that is that, when there is a project, of course we get very heavily involved. In the case of the INPEX project, if I can just digress for a minute, I am a member of a task force that it is involved in dealing with that project. My role on that is because my department is responsible for licensing pipelines from the Northern Territory border right up to the – I cannot recall the name; there is a technical name for it, but we will call it the valve on the beach. In that period, we are responsible for assessing the environmental and other considerations in approving the pipeline.

In the event that Sunrise came onshore, we would have exactly the same role. We are involved between where the gas arrives onshore and where it leaves the well head, depending on whether it is in Territory waters, of course. If it is not in Territory waters it depends on what negotiations are made. There have been occasions, for example with Blacktip, where we have acted as the authority after consultation with WA because Blacktip is in WA waters. There are a couple of kilometres where it goes from WA waters into Territory waters. The sensible way to manage that is for us to do the whole lot but, in that case, we do not manage the production head, we just manage the pipeline.

So, until there is a project, there is not a whole lot for us to get involved in. We need a project to be able to deal with and to manage. We are very interested at a higher level in how it is going; we want it to happen. When we can provide advice on a technical level, or other advice that is asked of us, we give it. But the Commonwealth is running that and its international negotiations and Sunrise are well beyond the normal activities of our department.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that, I am just trying to get an understanding of the linkages between the different levels of these projects.

Mr CARROLL: With these major projects, particularly offshore ones, the process is that they are managed out of the Chief Minister's Department. The Chief Minister's Department gets involved in all the Commonwealth and Territory negotiations and, on occasion, international negotiations. We provide the technical input and – I choose my words carefully - all the detailed work and all the technical expertise. There are two levels to this; there is the strategic and the high-level approval process, and there is the detailed approval process. It is our role at that lower level.

Mr MILLS: I believe I have a better understanding of that now. Therefore, when it came to the Glyde Point question, was the department called upon to provide technical advice regarding the nature, shape of that kind of development, if it were to go ahead?

Mr CARROLL: The Glyde Point project went for quite a number of years. In fact, I have been here eight years, and it was going when I arrived. So, it has been going quite some time. At various points where our expertise was required, we were engaged in that. That was, basically, a planning exercise and a whole-of-government exercise in determining how that might look and work. That was run, in my recollection, through Planning and Infrastructure and its predecessors, with input from the various departments which were involved. Ultimately, at the very high level, it was a strategic planning exercise. Our input comes in when there might be technical issues about whether you can do certain things in certain places and so on. Of course, we have views about things, from other parts of the department, about use of land for particular purposes because of its impact on industry such as Primary Industry and Fisheries. However, at the level that the Glyde Point project was at, we were not involved very closely. It was all being run, in my recollection, from Planning and Infrastructure and its predecessors.

Mr MILLS: Interesting. Thank you, minister.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1, Minerals and Energy, and Output 2.1, Minerals and Energy. In consideration that we have been going since 8.30 am, we will have a five minute break.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Minister, before we commence with Output 1.2, Primary Industry, there has been a request. The members for Blain and Nelson have some questions on similar issues and they would like to be able to ask backwards and forwards between each other on similar questions to group them together so that you are on one ...

Mr MILLS: It is just a possibility that we have, I thought rather than ...

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The example is, if they both want to talk about boofhead frogs, if they can both ask a question, rather than the member for Blain asking all of his and then the member for Nelson all of his.

Mr NATT: I do not have a problem with that, Madam Deputy Chair.

Answer to Question No 7.1

Mr NATT: Before we do start, Madam Deputy Chair, if you do not mind, I have some answers to some of the questions that were asked earlier on notice. To question No 7.1, the question on how many people are employed in the mining industry in the Northern Territory, how many are resident Northern Territory workers, and how many are fly-in/fly-out.

The answer to those is that these statistics were published in the 2008-09 budget papers according to the 2006 Census: 6700 people are employed in the mining industry in the Northern Territory. There are 1700, or 2% of the total resident employment are resident NT workers. There are 5000 employees who fly-in/fly-out, and they are associated with the Territory mining and energy industry, and manufacturing workers at Alcan Gove alumina plant and Wickham Point liquified gas plant, and construction workers in the mining industry. I am happy to table that.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.2

Mr NATT: The answer to the question on notice No 7.2 regarding what specific project programs and marketing has the government done since 2001 to attract mining companies to invest in the Territory. The answer to that is for the Northern Territory exploration initiative, 1999 to 2003, there was \$16m to fund acquisition and delivery of pre-competitive geoscience. The *Building the Territory Resource Base*, which I mentioned earlier, from 2003 to 2007, was \$15.2m funded via amendment to the EEC aspect of the *Mineral Royalty Act*. Four main elements from the program: acquisition and delivery of pre-competitive geoscience; titles administration; indigenous engagement; and domestic and international promotion.

The last one is the *Bringing Forward Discovery*, which is 2007 to 2011, and that is \$12m, of which there are two main elements: acquisition and delivery of pre-competitive geoscience; project facilitation and promotion, including China and Japan investment attraction strategy. Recently, we have added another \$2.4m to that over the next three years for the drilling and geogravity partnerships with the government.

Output 1.2 – Primary Industry

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 1.2, Primary Industry. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Minister, I would like to start at a higher level in some respects. We have just been talking about minerals. Of course, the mining activity is driven by a resources boom, a great desire for energy. Would you agree that the next major effect or influence on the Territory will be a response to the food shortage that is emerging as an international issue of great significance? If that be the case, how is the department responding to that growing recognition that global food shortage is the next major issue, and what part can the Territory play and how is the department positioned in response to that issue?

Mr NATT: Thank you for the question, member for Blain. I agree that probably the next big issue is the shortage of food worldwide. I guess the Northern Territory has been highlighted as a significant area for future investment in growth within the food area. That was highlighted by the former federal minister who said, 'move to the Northern Territory; that is where the water and the ground is'. In saying that, there is a lot more to it. My department has been doing a lot of work over the last 20-odd years, and is still doing a lot of work, to assist production and producers. I ask Mr Gobbey to elaborate.

Mr GOBBEY: Rod Gobbey, Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines. Thank you. I apologise for the voice today as well. The department is engaged in a number of research and development projects which I could elaborate on if requested. In addition to that, many of the inputs that could assist in food production, access to land and water, whilst we do not have direct authority as a department over those issues, we do work very closely with our colleagues elsewhere in NT government to ensure that the industry development issues are considered in establishing either administrative guidelines or advice to government. I would say the relationship between, hopefully, me and my senior staff with colleagues elsewhere in government is very strong.

Mr NATT: Could I elaborate, member for Blain, if you do not mind. It is fair to say that mineral exploration does not just happen by chance. This government has made a firm commitment to enhance mining and exploration in the Northern Territory. As I said before, the catch cry we are using is 'vast land rich in minerals with lots of potential', and we are putting money in to attract mineral exploration in the Territory. In elaborating on that as well, we have also formed a horticultural partnership group, which is headed by Peter Delis. They are currently putting together a blueprint for the future of horticulture and agriculture for the Northern Territory. I will ask my CEO to elaborate.

Mr CARROLL: If I may just add, one of the issues is not just whether we have capacity in the Territory, but whether what we produce can be sold outside the Territory to meet the demand. We have seen, in some areas - for example, grapes north of Alice Springs at Ti Tree - where changing cost structures and changing demand has had an impact on the industry. Despite our earlier predictions that it would grow significantly, in fact it is not growing, and that is because of these other external factors that apply.

The point I make to the committee is that the question of increased production is a complex one. It requires a whole range of factors from the various inputs of suitable land, water, and so on, right through to the marketplace and the cost of getting the product to the marketplace. An example is, last year I think it was, when we were exporting hay to Victoria during the drought period from the Douglas Daly, and people were able to do that profitably because of the high price of hay in Victoria. In normal times, they cannot do it because the cost of transportation is so high.

There are other limiting factors like, for perishables, speed of access to market, whether we have freight capacity on planes, whether we have the right sort of equipment to get things there. It is a very complicated issue and it is not as simple as people down south tend to think; that we get lots of rain for six months or less of the year, and they extrapolate that as if that falls on average here every day - it does not - and whether the particular crops that will grow here are available and meet the needs of the marketplace. So, there is a whole range of issues in there that are very complex and we keep an eye on. As Mr Gobbey said, it is a complex issue right across government that does not just require our input to solve, but other agencies as well.

Mr MILLS: Okay.

Mr NATT: Mr Carroll just mentioned the crops and the work that the department has been doing. There is an information booklet put out on the research that has been undertaken in the Northern Territory, and also the summary of the crops that have been investigated over the last 20 years. Region by region, we have the Darwin and Douglas Daly region, the Katherine region and Central Australia region. There has been work undertaken in the research and development and extension in those areas of fruit, vegetables, ornamentals, pasture, field and fodder crops, forestry and others. All of those areas have been covered. There is an extensive amount of information that the department has undertaken over those years. All of that information is available in these booklets and on the web. An extensive amount of work has been done on all sorts of crops and pastoral activities within the Territory.

And let us not forget our cattle. Live cattle exports from the Territory now are exceeding all expectations - opening up Aboriginal land, putting more cattle out there. The infrastructure and development that we are undertaking on some of those pastoral properties is quite significant. There is a lot of science, a lot of work going into it, and the department is supporting it as much as they can.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Getting down to some specifics, though, do you have a measure of food production in the Territory? Are you able to measure the amount of food produced in the Northern Territory - whether it is protein, grain or whatever? Is there a measure of food production?

Mr NATT: I am sure there are specific figures on the crops that are produced each year, and I am sure that is available. Again, I might hand that across to Mr Gobbey to give us some more information.

Mr MILLS: What I am after is: is there a measure, such as how much is this farm, let us say, producing? How much is the Territory producing in what can be defined as food?

Mr NATT: I am sure those tonnages would be available, so, Mr Gobbey?

Mr GOBBEY: As to the breakdown to a level of protein, we do not go down to that level, but we do have available the value of the broad industries at one level - the pastoral industry, its subcomponents being those cattle that are exported overseas, together with those that are sent interstate for further value adding. Also, within the pastoral industry let us not forget the buffalo industry, it is a small subsection of that.

Mr MILLS: Camels?

Mr GOBBEY: I might pass on the camels as a production animal, given that it is not farmed, therefore, not part of our responsibilities.

Mr MILLS: I thought there was a farm at Alice Springs, but go on.

Mr GOBBEY: We do have, at the higher level, the value of the pastoral industry per se. We have the value of the crops, forestry and horticultures, with the mangoes, of course, being the largest of those. The value of the produce at the farm gate is readily available.

Mr MILLS: Good. If that is the case then, they would be adequate measures for my purposes. Are you able to, therefore, provide those figures, so I can compare apples with apples ...

Mr SELLERS: Mangoes with mangoes.

Mr MILLS: ... mangoes with mangoes, buffaloes with buffaloes, over the last five years, or it would be tremendous if it were 10 years. However, I will go for five, although it is better if you have 10. I do acknowledge that you did say - perhaps it was a mistake, minister, when you referred to all the good work that has been going on in the department over the last 20 years. That, surely, cannot be right, because the Country Liberal Party was in government for a period of that time, and no good thing actually emerged during that period, as you have given reference to on a number of occasions.

Mr NATT: Point taken.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr MILLS: We will let that ride, I am joking. Do you have 10, or five years of equivalent measures so that we can see how this farm, in a sense, is going? How are we going with our production?

Mr NATT: Again, I am sure those figures may be available. I will hand that to Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: Member for Blain, we do not have that data to hand today. I could relatively quickly acquire the values of the main primary industries by sector, certainly over the last five years, and make that available.

Mr MILLS: That would be tremendous, thank you very much. I will take that on notice?

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Member for Blain, for the purposes ...

Mr NATT: Sorry, member for Blain, a lot of those figures would be spelled out in the budget, the Northern Territory economy booklet. There are percentages there of how much the forecast has increased, numbers of cattle that have gone overseas, what the Asian vegetables have done, how they have increased. There is a lot of that information available, I am sure, if you go back through the budget books. However, we are happy to chase it out if you need to.

Mr MILLS: Yes, certainly. The information I am seeking, I trust, would supplement that. I need a little more data, you see, to plot our way forward.

Question on Notice 7.3

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

Mr MILLS: I request of the minister comparable data on food production in the Territory over the last five years.

Mr NATT: Sorry, can I get that a little more specific, if you do not mind, member for Blain? Are there any particular categories you are looking for?

Mr MILLS: Yes, as has been offered, by sector, marrying up with what has just been offered. If I say the wrong word now, does that mean I do not get what I do not ask for?

Mr NATT: No, we will try to do the best we can under the circumstances.

Mr MILLS: It is just a reference point for what has just been offered. What has just been offered me, I will have it, thank you.

Mr NATT: Perhaps some of the sectors that are spelled out within the budget booklet?

Mr MILLS: Yes, as long as it is comparable over the five years, so, what I get I can then work on those budget figures and come up with a clearer picture of where we are going in our production capacity.

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

Mr NATT: I am.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate the question No 7.3.

Mr MILLS: Related to this, then, is the numerous references to the complexity of these matters, and the reference that the mining industry has expanded and grown, driven by a resources boom - not by accident, but by plan and design. Food production in the Territory will not happen by accident either. It needs a plan and a design and, in order to develop effective policy and good planning, you need good research. Could you please describe, in detail, the research capacity today and how that compares with five years ago?

Mr NATT: Again, the person who will be right across that is Mr Gobbey, so I will ask him to elaborate on that.

Mr GOBBEY: Member for Blain, the starting point is to provide details of the current research that we are undertaking. At the peak level, there are 53 research projects within the Primary Industry group of the department that are active at the moment. They are a mixture of those that are funded exclusively by the NT budget and some that are funded with external partners. Within the Crops, Forestry and Horticulture Division, I make the point there are 13 research projects, some of which are ongoing and some have finite deadlines. I mention those. There is a crop forecasting system that is being done in conjunction with the Australian mango industry, and that is across the mango growing area of northern Australian. That is important for the industry in terms of harvest, labour and transport logistics.

There is another project that is being done in Darwin, Katherine and Kununurra in conjunction with the industry. It is implementing a Top End Mangoes Project, which is the name of the project, and that is due to continue until at least the middle of 2009. There is another project happening in Darwin and Katherine, that is delivery of better technology to the mango industry, and that is extending at least to the middle of 2009 ...

Mr MILLS: Excuse me, Madam Deputy Chair, can I just interrupt, in the interests of time, is it possible to table that overview?

Mr GOBBEY: The document that I have is annotated with notes to help me refresh my memory, so it is ...

Mr MILLS: So, if you need them, I certainly will need them.

Mr GOBBEY: There may be a cleaner copy of this document available that I have not annotated.

Mr MILLS: In addition, I am actually seeking that, plus a snapshot of five years ago so we can compare mangoes with mangoes.

Mr GOBBEY: Member for Blain, what I suggest that could meet your needs - this document I have in front of me is a relatively new database of our research projects. I am not aware of something comparable to this existing five years ago. Perhaps if this document were to be tabled - albeit a clean copy of this document - together with the documents the minister referred to earlier that provide a picture of research previously undertaken, whilst not precisely aligning by research topic, certainly gives a very clear picture of past research together with current research.

Mr MILLS: I will accept that, thank you. So we are comparing mangoes to dragon fruit, but that will be enough.

Mr GOBBEY: Well, we can table that.

Mr MILLS: I get the grubby copy?

Mr GOBBEY: No, you get the pristine copy, as is appropriate for the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr MILLS: Oh, thank you very much. I will now talk about research efforts. Berrimah Farm - the changes that are already announced regarding the plans for Berrimah Farm, how will that research effort be displaced and how will it appear in other places? How is research effort being affected by the government's plans to get rid of Berrimah Farm?

Mr NATT: Again, research will not be affected to any great extent. We have some trees out there and are undertaking to take some of that gene technology to other farms. Mr Carroll has been heavily involved in some of that work undertaken, so I will hand it across to him.

Mr CARROLL: When the decision was taken for Berrimah Farm to no longer be operated as a farm, at that point the department, historically, had done a lot of research there. Over the years, that had wound down and there was little research going on.

The project the minister is referring to is an African mahogany trial that will be completed by, from the information I have, 2011-12. At the end of its life, we no longer need the land for that purpose. That project is not a problem. There are some other horticulture projects on the site that will be transferred to Coastal Plains, because we retained Coastal Plains Research Station and Beatrice Hill Research Station. There are places in the Top End where horticulture and other activities can take place.

We have cattle on the remainder, as you will probably see when you drive past. They are not research cattle, they are just to maintain the land. We do have a herd of 20 Sentinel cattle, which are very important in identifying diseases coming into the Top End, as the Top End is the gateway for diseases for Australia - airborne diseases and so on. We are actively working to find other places to locate that. The preferred location at the moment, subject to negotiation and approval by government, is adjacent to the cattle yards run by the NT Livestock Exporters Association. That will mean we have the cattle adjacent to the exporting cattle so, if there is a problem at any stage, we can assure overseas buyers and overseas countries that diseases are being dealt with. Ceasing activity on Berrimah Farm will not impact on research for the department or for the Territory.

Mr MILLS: That is an interesting thing to say, when you have already said that it was in decline. So, when we happen to come to this point, there is little happening. It is like the stars have aligned and it is not such an issue, then, to change the purpose of that land. I understand. It is a small town, but you are hearing people saying that things have changed significantly in the department regarding the activity related to research. I hear that the same thing has occurred at Coastal Plains, where there has been very little activity, as compared to a few years ago. What remaining activities that you have indicated still exist at Berrimah Farm, whatever they are, will now transfer across to Coastal Plains where, it appears to me, there is very little happening. What is happening now at Coastal Plains? What is that remaining bit of research effort that is going to go across to Coastal Plains? What is happening at Coastal Plains now? And what will be transferred from Berrimah to Coastal Plains?

Mr CARROLL: I might answer that at the higher level and get Mr Gobbey to give you the detail. At the higher level, the general approach of the department is to do research that is relevant to industry. That does not mean that you have to do it on your own property. Often, research is better undertaken on private properties in production so that you can get a proper assessment of the economics of what you do, and whether it works in a real farm situation.

The reality is that our farms are set up in a way that is probably not the same as someone who is in it for commercial reasons. We have different imperatives and we have longer terms. Probably, for some of our facilities, there would be people in the private sector who would say they would give their right arm to have half of what we have, because we do have very good facilities in some cases. But, for outcomes in the Territory, we need to do things that are real and things that will work in production, not because we are doing it just for the science. Having said that general overview, Mr Gobbey can give you some more specifics of what it is we do at both Berrimah and Coastal Plains.

Mr MILLS: So, first is: what is going from Berrimah to Coastal Plains? What is occurring currently at Coastal Plains?

Mr GOBBEY: To clarify the Berrimah situation further: there is research happening at Berrimah that is contained within the facilities at Berrimah and not in the paddocks. In the document that has been tabled, that is the fourth of the four pages that have been tabled, there are six or seven projects that are contained within the laboratories there. I envisage that, for the life of those projects, there would be no change to those.

In relation to the specific issue at Coastal Plains, there are ongoing projects at Coastal Plains relating to the development of new products for plant industries. Two projects, should the Berrimah land usage change outside of the 8 ha footprint that is intended to be retained, would be associated with the hardwood genetic improvement. With that work, it would be the intention to not only replicate that at Coastal Plains, but perhaps at other places to build on the work that is happening at Katherine as well.

There is some new ornamental crop work in the nursery industries that has traditionally been done at Berrimah and other places. I envisage that continuity of that work, in consultation with the nursery industry, would transfer to Coastal Plains.

Mr Carroll mentioned that there is a trend towards doing some research, but not all, on private land. We would work with our partners in industry on that. We would, on a case-by-case basis of each research project, if we are the proponent, or if industry are the proponents, we would determine if that work needed to be done on government land or would be better done on a fully commercial property.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Gobbey. Minister, I think it was last year, when probing this very important research area, that research and development capacity - when we were trying to develop policy to attend to the challenges and opportunities with food production - there was reference made to a review that was under way in this area of research farms. Has that review been completed?

Mr NATT: The review is currently being undertaken and is close to being finalised. It is a review that started back in ...

Mr MILLS: 2006 or something.

Mr NATT: Yes.

Mr MILLS: That is a long time.

Mr NATT: I will hand across to Mr Carroll to elaborate.

Mr CARROLL: I believe the honourable member is referring to the facilities program whereby we identified all the facilities of the department across the Territory, and we undertook a series of studies to determine how they met our current needs in all the things the department needs to do. As you will recall, we have facilities, not only the Berrimah Farm, Coastal Plains and Beatrice Hill we have already mentioned, but Katherine Research Station, Douglas Daly, Kidman Springs, Alice Springs, we have the Arid Zone Research Institute as well as Old Man Plains, which is part of the old Owen Springs pastoral leasehold, and one in Ti Tree as well

The purpose of that review was to look at each facility, determine the purpose for which it had been established, to determine whether the facilities that were there met our current needs, and to identify what, if any, expenditure the government might need to enable the facilities to be fit for the purpose. It also included other facilities we have such as the cool stores in Power Street in Alice Springs and at Farrell Crescent. So there was a suite of about 15 programs - I cannot remember the number exactly.

We have been through the process. We have a number of decisions that require formal decisions by government, so that involves preparation of Cabinet submissions and advice to Cabinet. The process has been meeting its targets in that the reports that were required to be provided to the minister have been provided. The minister has directed us to take the necessary action, including the preparation of Cabinet submissions. The first one, of course, is Berrimah Farm, and that has been through the process. For the remainder, I assume there will be public announcements in due course when the government has considered the issues.

Mr MILLS: That is alarming because, if it has taken 18 months, the first one to get through the system gets sold off.

Mr CARROLL: No.

Mr MILLS: Therefore, as I have seen this same enterprise embarked on in other jurisdictions, the result is a rationalisation of research effort, which means you sell the properties, and research effort then is controlled by the private sector and the results of that research is owned privately, not publicly. I am very concerned.

Mr NATT: You have expressed your concern, member for Blain, but your statement is not completely true. We constantly audit our facilities. Any responsible government would do that. A rolling review of our facilities is always undertaken. I am sure we have the necessary infrastructure and the facilities to deliver on the agreed outcomes. There are no plans to close any of the facilities - absolutely no plans at all to close any of the facilities.

Mr MILLS: You have not completed but one, and the result of that one is a closure of a research capacity.

Mr NATT: We have not closed it. We have sold off ...

Mr MILLS: Effectively closed.

Mr NATT: No, we have not. The work that has been undertaken at Berrimah will still be undertaken. We have only sold land off. We have not cut back on any other activities of the farm.

Mr MILLS: Okay. So, when my family sold the farm, we effectively sold our capacity. You might have had the homestead left, but you have lost the farm. The research farm is gone as a result of this review into research capacity, resulted in the first cab off the ranks: 'Let us sell it'. What is the value of ...

Mr NATT: Can I just correct you there. We do not do any research at Berrimah. It is vet facilities and administration.

Mr MILLS: Currently?

Mr NATT: Currently.

Mr MILLS: Has any research occurred there in the past?

Mr NATT: I would have to ask my CEO.

Mr CARROLL: The major research we do at Berrimah Farm is in the Veterinary Laboratory and the Berrimah Agricultural Laboratory, both of which, under the current plans of the government, are being retained, not being sold off. There is an 8 ha footprint that is being retained and those facilities are all within that 8 ha footprint. The other activities that we do - for example, the plantation we referred to before. That will be at the end of its project life anyway by the time the land is converted to other uses, and future research will be undertaken at Coastal Plains.

For the remainder of it, one of the issues for us has been that the facilities at Berrimah Farm were constructed - I think it had its 50th birthday two years ago, or thereabouts. It will be 52, I think, in November. Some of the buildings we have there are nearly as old as I am, which shows you how old they are. The only facility on Berrimah Farm that has sewerage is the vet lab. All the rest is on septic tank, substandard accommodation for our staff. So, there are some very important issues there about how we provide for our staff into the future. But, in terms of the research that gets taken there, the vast bulk of the research is done

in two laboratories, which remain, and the other areas are mostly grazed by cattle on their way somewhere else to do something else, but not for research.

We also have, of course, the issue that the Tiger Brennan Drive extension will cut that road in half anyway and make it, certainly unviable as even a management place to run cattle to make any money out of it, so we can cover the costs of running it.

Mr MILLS: Just the last one on this then. You mentioned the African mahoganies. I have not heard anything about the mangoes that are there. Apparently, there is some valuable genetic stock at the farm. There has been no reference to those at all. Are they going?

Mr NATT: Again, I understand, there are some mango trees out there, but the genetics and the rootstock have been allocated to other areas. Again, I would ask Mr Gobbey to elaborate.

Mr GOBBEY: It is my understanding that those mangoes that are at the farm that do have an economic development opportunity are replicated elsewhere. Some of the other mangoes are of an historical nature in terms of past trials and have not been commercialised.

Mr MILLS: Oh, historical in that sense?

Mr GOBBEY: Not historical in the sense of ...

Mr MILLS: So, you can cut them down?

Mr GOBBEY: Yes.

Mr CARROLL: There is no tree of knowledge there we are going to cut down.

Mr MILLS: I beg your pardon?

Mr CARROLL: There is no tree of knowledge we are going to cut down. Nothing of value is being cut down.

Mr MILLS: Okay, that is reassuring. Anyway, this project to investigate the appropriate use of our facilities in the Territory has been going for 18 months. When will it conclude?

Mr NATT: I think Mr Carroll just answered that.

Mr CARROLL: In relation to Katherine, a series of decisions have been taken in relation to Katherine Research Station, which is to retain it.

Mr MILLS: Oh, what a relief. Okay.

Mr CARROLL: The member for Katherine, I believe, will be pleased to hear that.

Mrs MILLER: Very pleased.

Mr CARROLL: In fact, this is a good example of why we did this study. What we have identified as a result of the study at Katherine Research Station is probably three things. The first thing is we need facilities in Katherine because we provide services there. We needed a place for them, so we have identified the place we have - despite some of the buildings being old and needing some work on them - as the right place for us to be, so we need to be there.

The second one is that the research station is on the edge of town and is a valuable resource for Katherine, and that there are areas that will potentially be part of future residential expansion in Katherine. We have identified around 220 ha that we will continue to manage until such time as it is required. The purpose for doing that is to ensure that we do not spend public money on that 220 ha, such as putting buildings, sheds or whatever that will have to be bulldozed when it becomes residential land. So, we have a plan for the future for that.

The third thing is that there is an area to the south which is used for running cattle. Those cattle are an integral part of the Douglas Daly/Kidman Springs research activities - and these are real research activities, they are not the sort of stuff we do at Berrimah. It is an integral part of the system of maintaining the supply

of cattle for research and so on. There is also some land there that is very suitable for growing crops that feed those cattle. The Katherine one has been identified in that system.

Until the study was done, nobody had that view and nobody had a plan for Katherine. What we are trying to do is to get those plans, and we are working through the same with Alice Springs. The Alice Springs one I cannot talk about because it has not yet been before government to make the decisions that need to be made, but it takes into account all those sorts of issues as well, including in Alice Springs the water reuse project, which is a very important one for the future of horticulture in the Centre, as well as dealing with the waste water in a sensible way for the Alice Springs community.

Mr MILLS: Douglas Daly?

Mr CARROLL: Douglas Daly is now going through the process, but it is linked with Kidman, so Kidman and Douglas Daly are going together.

Mr MILLS: When is that likely to be?

Mr CARROLL: At the end of this year.

Mr MILLS: That blueprint you referred to, I believe Mr Delis was involved in. When is that going to be completed?

Mr NATT: I understand it is near completion or is completed?

Mr CARROLL: My understanding is that the Horticulture Partnership Group met last week or the week before. The information I have is that members were looking at a final draft. They are a ministerial advisory body, so they do not report through me, they report directly to the minister. Our understanding is that they will be reporting to the minister within the month.

Mr WOOD: I will go backwards to talk about research stations at Ti Tree. Is that up for auditing as well?

Mr NATT: Yes.

Mr WOOD: That has been done?

Mr CARROLL: We have done a study on Ti Tree. The conclusion out of that was that it provides a very valuable facility for Centrefarm. Centrefarm is a company which is sponsored by the CLC, a non-profit organisation that is about getting Aboriginal land into production and creating employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. We provided Centrefarm facilities to enable them to train apprentices. At the moment, the information I have is that there are 17 apprentices who would be in their 12th week out of 20 weeks training. The plan in the long term is to use the Ti Tree facility for training people so that they can become productive employees in the horticulture industry. One of the big issues in Ti Tree is the problem with the table grapes and the long-term viability of the industry.

Mr WOOD: I also have concerns about research. The Chief Minister said I had gone to the flat earth brigade, maybe I reminisce a lot. We used to do research and I believe we should still, because I regard the Territory as a pioneering area, not like Victoria which has been doing research for 100 years or so. We need to be researching new products. The problem I have is, when the industry drives it, it will drive the government to do research on products that it wants researched. Is it surely not the role for the government to play, as it used to in doing varietal trials of crops, to at least open up opportunities for people to come in and use that research to develop new crops? Coastal Plains used to do all that work, and so did Berrimah Farm, because I used to come in with Aboriginal groups on open day and see the varieties of tomatoes being grown at Berrimah Farm, as well as other crops such as sweet potatoes which was something that the Northern Territory Primary Industry section developed. I believe the white variety called the Maningrida was developed by the department. So, minister, do you see that we have slackened off in that emphasis on the government having a role in creating new crops and new opportunities for industry, rather than just doing what industry says?

Mr NATT: No, to answer your question, member for Nelson, I do not believe we are slackening off. If you were to obtain a copy, which we have tabled, of this research and development extension of the crops work we have undertaken from 1997 to 2007, you will see that there is something like 300-odd trials on various fruit, vegetables, ornamentals, pasture field and fodder crops, forestry and others. Over the years, there has been extensive work undertaken on many crops, on how they work in the various regions. I

mentioned those regions before - Darwin, Douglas Daly regions, Katherine and Central Australia. All of that information is available.

We also meet regularly with the Horticultural Association and the Agricultural Association. We attend their meetings. I personally had regular meetings with the executives of those associations. We are constantly asking them to give us some guidance on where they want to go with some of the crops that they want to trial. Mr Gobbey might like to elaborate a little more, but I know that the department is constantly working with them to encourage them to look at other areas. The issues that arise from these situations is, if I am going to go ahead and grow pomegranates, am I going to get a viable market? They are the economic issues that the growers have to face and work with. We have all the information on how to grow them, where to grow them, and all the other information in relation to pesticides, weeds, soil, water, all of those sorts of things. That is all there. We are happy to work with them. Mr Gobbey will elaborate on that.

Mr GOBBEY: Member for Nelson, the minister is correct. There has been a quite significant number of different crops and horticultural produce trialled over a number of years. It is my intention, in the next budget cycle, to not only work with new proponents who come to the Territory - we receive inquiries, as you would imagine, from time to time, from people who wish to relocate. I give the example of the Peanut Company of Australia, with whom we working very closely with. It is not at a mature stage yet, but we are receiving some inquiries, for example, from the potato industry on whether there can be commercially grown potatoes in the Territory. That is at very early days of discussion.

What that highlights to me is that, whilst the number of genuinely new crops that could be grown might be limited, it may be worth investigating going back to some of the significant body of work we have already done. Due to the changed circumstances because of better transport logistics, the cost of production in southern Australia, particularly during the winter for glasshouse production, and the cost of fuel, perhaps some of the crops that we have previously trialled here may be worth revisiting. In the past, because of a whole range of issues, they may not have been able to be competitively supplied to the market. Perhaps now they can be, and that would warrant some analysis, I believe.

Mr WOOD: I will get into that business about markets and all that a little later. Minister, I grew capsicums. It was a variety called Espidon. How did I know that variety was the suitable variety? Because the research station had done trials on capsicums. They knew that that variety had a high leaf coverage for a hot climate and produced a good quality capsicum. I could not have trialled every variety of capsicum in all the seed catalogues; I would have spent a fortune. The trials that the department did enabled me to pick up a particular variety and it was successful.

There were trials going on at Coastal Plains a number of years ago on things like cauliflower, cabbages and other vegetables. I would have thought that, with all the talk about farming coming to the north with a reliance on the amount of water we have here, we should have some of that information available. On the other side of it, because all this is about commercial decisions, until our government says there is land available with guaranteed water nothing is going to happen. Until there is land available no one is going to come here. However, if they say that, and they know the research work has been done on these crops, we have a railway line north and south, there is high cost of productions down south with water trading - water is expensive - surely, we can plan ahead by doing a research and development on crops in various parts of the Territory? The Sturt Plateau is one area that we really need to look at as well, it is a nice area for farms and growing things.

Surely, they are some of the things that we should be doing as a department and as a government; that is, getting all that research done, continuing to do it, because, for instance, the varieties of cauliflowers and cabbages that we have been growing came from Taiwan. That was 10 years ago; there might now be suitable varieties that have a longer growing period that will fit in to future horticultural production in the Northern Territory. I just feel that that initiative that was done 10 years ago has gone.

I just had a quick glance through the booklet. I do not see any varietal trials for vegetables and fruit. I see pastures, rangeland and other things but, from a horticultural perspective, maybe mangoes are in there. I believe we have lost opportunities to expand, you might say, our non-Asian vegetable market, simply because a lot of that research has stopped.

Mr NATT: Again, member for Nelson, regarding the research and development booklet that we have tabled, very quickly, 19 fruits and around 12 to 15 vegetables have been trialled. And, yes, you are right, there are different varieties that do come on to the market from time to time. Again, I emphasise the fact that we work closely with the Horticultural Association to find out what sort of crops they would like to trial,

and where the government can work with them to assist them. For more information, Mr Gobbey would like to elaborate.

Mr GOBBEY: Member for Nelson, perhaps if I could give you an example of work we will be starting, I hope, in the near future. It relates to the research property at Alice Springs where there is in the vicinity of 300 ha of land that we have identified that could be suitable for intensive horticulture production. This is dependent and reliant upon the Power and Water reuse water from the town which, approximately three weeks ago, commenced being delivered to the research farm.

Whilst there will be a process to call for expressions of interest for the use of that land, as a preliminary step to that, it is important to give potential proponents to commercialise that site a very good idea of what could be grown on that site in terms of the water quality and the land suitability. So, we will be undertaking some experiments there in growing crop types in conventional horticulture that stretch the capacity of the crops in terms of both water quality and soil suitability. We undertake that research, in the main, to prove, from our point of view, what is unsuitable to be grown there, which is equally as important for a commercial proponent. I propose that that work at Alice Springs would be starting at a suitable climatic time in the next few months.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, I will not drag on that too long, but I understand that that is a good thing to do. I studied horticulture in Victoria. A lot of the temperate climate crops that we are used to eating had a huge amount of research done in Mildura, with similar climate to Alice Springs. A lot of those varietal trials can be expanded over a fair bit of Australia because of the similar climate.

The challenge for the north is that we do not live in a climate similar to Alice Springs, we live in a high rainfall, high humidity area. The research that I believe we need to do is how we can adapt crops for a different climate. That is what I thought people who worked at Coastal Plains Research Station were trying to do. They were trying to adapt crops through the varietal trials. They cannot stop, because varieties keep coming in all the time. So, you are selecting them and finding out the information. When you hit on something, you then spread that information out to the commercial world. Using information the department has, if a person thinks there is an opportunity to make some money out of that and, if land and water is available, then we are helping, basically, to feed Australia because we have done the work ourselves - we have done the research. It may be pie in the sky, but I felt that is where we were 10 years ago and I do not quite feel that is where we are today.

Mr NATT: Well, again, a lot of that information that we gained 10 years ago is still available; there are still a lot of facts sheet around. I have a stand in my office with all the facts sheets on the various things that can be grown in the tropics, in and around the northern regions more specifically. You are talking about working on specific crops for specific areas. I know we are undertaking a bush tomato trial at AZRI, working with the department there to see if we can grow that out into some of the indigenous communities. We have done a lot of work in and around the Ti Tree area on the grapes and melons. In Katherine, they are doing a lot of research on the various crops - the mangoes, biofuel crops and all those sorts of things.

There is a lot of research being undertaken, but I guess we need feedback from the Horticultural Association to find out what crops they would like to work with. I do not know whether I have covered it all, Mr Gobbey, but do you wish to elaborate?

Mr GOBBEY: If I might add to the minister's comments. I believe it is important that the research that can be done as part of my program is informed by the commercial world, and I would welcome the opportunity to sit down with sectoral leaders and see what research we have done in the past that may need to be reassessed in terms of the changes I outlined earlier. I would also be interested in views on what new species or varieties might be trialled.

Mr NATT: Just to elaborate, again, I emphasise we work closely with the NTHA. We have a good rapport with the association to work with the department. Also, from time to time throughout the year, various departmental officers are actually travelling overseas, and it is mainly within the South-East Asia area, to different seminars and conferences just to find out what new crops are available and what new potential there is in some of those areas. All of that information is fed back to the department as well. It is an ongoing process. I guess you are hinting that we are cutting back on it. I do not believe we are. We are trying to push as much information out there as we can. However, I guess it is up to the proponents that want to take up the challenges to have a crack at it.

Mr WOOD: Minister, can I get back to the closure of Berrimah Farm? Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Did the government come and say: 'We are going to close it?' Or did you say: 'Look, we do not

need it anymore, so if you want to use the land go ahead and put houses on it'. Who made the initial announcement that this land would be identified for housing? Did you have to then say: 'All right, well we need this and you have the rest?'

Mr NATT: I am unsure where the initial query came from, but I am sure Mr Carroll would have more information on that.

Mr CARROLL: Before the government made its announcement, it received advice from us that we did not need all of that land for that purpose. The chicken and the egg syndrome is: the chicken called DPIFM and told the government that the egg that it was sitting on ...

Mr MILLS: They are not going to lay any more eggs.

Mr CARROLL: No. The government egg it was sitting on was not ever going to hatch because there was not any research on it, except for the 8 ha footprint, which is very important. The laboratories are extremely important regarding the biosecurity system for the Territory and the research that goes into diseases. The laboratory function is sacrosanct. Whether they stay in that location forever, in my mind, is not important. The important thing is that that function happens, and it happens at the standard we provide it now, if not better.

Mr WOOD: That is the picture at Berrimah Farm today.

Mr CARROLL: A very nice one.

Mr WOOD: That is very nice. That block of land is bigger than 8 ha by a long way, so how much of that is going to disappear?

Mr CARROLL: From Makagon Road to the end of the laboratories, so Goff Letts Building, CS Robinson Building ...

Mr WOOD: All going?

Mr CARROLL: Going.

Mr WOOD: They might not be that old.

Mr CARROLL: Well, when they have carpet on the wall and have not been refurbished for over 20 years ...

Mr WOOD: Well, maybe the maintenance ...

Mr CARROLL: Well, the estimates for the cost of refurbishing are greater than the cost of building new buildings.

Mr WOOD: They are still using my old horticultural college; it is well over that length of time.

Mr CARROLL: As I said before, that building is not sewered and, in 2008, to start work for sewerage purposes ...

Mr WOOD: Could I suggest that the sewage pond down here is quite close by, if that is the only problem.

Mr CARROLL: The problem is how you make it work and the cost of making it work.

Mr WOOD: Anyway, that is beside the point. Minister, you have a forestry plantation in there, aside from the mahogany trial?

Mr CARROLL: That is the mahogany trial.

Mr WOOD: But there is more than just mahogany in there, isn't there? You can see it from the highway. Are they a varietal trial of forest trees?

Mr NATT: Perhaps Mr Gobbey might like to elaborate.

Mr GOBBEY: It is my understanding that the trees of significant importance are African mahoganies.

Mr CARROLL: I understand there are other trees than mahoganies, but they are not viable.

Mr WOOD: Well, that is what the trial was to prove.

Mr CARROLL: Exactly, they have proved not to be viable, so we can trial other trees.

Mr WOOD: That was convenient, they lost their viability in the drought at the time of the announcement. You good trees. And the farm buildings are all going to go?

Mr CARROLL: Well, if we do not have a farm, we do not need farm buildings.

Mr WOOD: Could I suggest it could be the prison farm. I will ask the minister, not you, sorry, Mr Carroll. Was there any consideration to using it as a prison farm, because in the CAYA report it did mention the prison farm and this was the suggestion that the land would be available. So, was there any thought pertaining ...

Mr NATT: Again, that would be a question for the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, or Justice.

Mr WOOD: Well, can I ask a global question? Do you think, on the basis of primary industry and improving production in the Northern Territory, that prison farms could play a part in horticultural production in the Northern Territory?

Mr NATT: They could play a role somewhere down the track. In this particular instance, the decision that has been made by government is a good one. We will look at those other instances down the track.

Mr WOOD: Because Cabinet said so. However, this is ideal land, it has been used for farming before, it is flat, it has water, it is next to the prison.

Mr MILLS: We have lost the debate, Gerry.

Mr NATT: The decision has been made.

Mr WOOD: I know, well, not all decisions are impossible.

Mr MILLS: With a change of government, you never know.

Mr WOOD: I know we are going back to what the member for Blain was talking about, but are you discussing with Lands and Planning opening up land to make it available for more intense agriculture or horticulture so that commercial operators, if they see an opportunity to grow crops, can mark it and can actually do it? Once upon a time, the previous government - love them or hate them - opened up all the land around the Douglas Daly/Fleming area. To some extent, that has all come to a grinding halt because of political, environmental or whatever reasons.

We have land at the Ord River and we have not developed it. We have land at Sturt Plateau. I know it is mainly for cattle, but there are certainly opportunities in that area. So, have you, as a department, working with the government, tried to move forward with the possibility of more intensive agriculture in the Northern Territory?

Mr NATT: Before all that happens, we would have to have some sort of indication from a proponent who would be wishing to work with that land. To answer that question, I will ask Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: For clarification from the member for Nelson, is this specifically in relation to the Ord River or in general?

Mr WOOD: In general, but the Ord River is one of those that is sitting out there and we are still waiting. The Western Australia government has actually said on *The Country Hour* one time that we are dragging our feet, and I believe we are.

Mr NATT: I would like to disagree with you, member for Nelson. I can assure you I have had a number of meetings with minister Ford over the Ord River Scheme. The problem is that the water is on the western side of the border. They are still trying to find a proponent ...

Mr WOOD: Some of it is our water.

Mr NATT: Sorry?

Mr WOOD: Some of it is our water they have in there.

Mr NATT: Yes, well, that is true, but it is sitting on the western side of the border. I understand that the Western Australia government still have not found a proponent to undertake the construction of the work that is required for that stage, and that is going to be a long way down the track. Until that is done, we will keep our finger on the pulse to find out what happens in the near future, because there is no use us undertaking extensive work or studies in that area until something of any significance comes from the Western Australia government.

Mr WOOD: Would you not say, minister, except for the Douglas Daly and maybe some of the horticultural land that the government released - and you can see when it releases land for a purpose, it is taken up - except for Douglas Daly and, say, Lambells Lagoon, Humpty Doo, Berry Springs area, - I will make exception for the sewerage water recycling project in Alice Springs - there has not been a big project by the government to release land for intensive agriculture? I am not saying people will take it up but, if there is no land available to take up for those purposes, then we are just going to have a status quo. Surely, there must be pressure that it is eventually going to happen on this part of the world to start developing because of the water problem?

Mr NATT: I am sure this government is open to looking at those situations but, until a proponent comes in and says, 'I am interested in developing that area', it is insignificant at this stage.

Mr WOOD: Has that happened with Douglas Daly? Or was it the case that the Territory said: 'We will take the initiative. We see this land as suitable, there is good soil, there is good water. We will take the initiative and subdivide'? Whether the subdivision was perfect or not, we will not get into that debate but, they took the lead. People did come from down south, and a lot of mistakes were made. However, I would have thought now we have learned from those mistakes and we can actually move along and can open up other opportunities.

Mr NATT: I am unaware of the history of the Douglas Daly, but I stand by the statement I just made.

Mr MILLS: I understand, on the Western Australia side of the border, with the Ord Stage 2 issue, that they have put significant resources into resolving those issues, so much so that they have a senior committee run out of the Premier's department to resolve issues such as native title, zoning issues and so on. What equivalent effort has occurred on this side? Is it in the Chief Minister's Department? Are the senior ministers involved in brokering a way forward on this matter? Or are we ...

Mr NATT: I will go back to the statement I just made. We have been in constant contact with minister Ford's office. I understand that, in recent times, the Western Australia government has put several million dollars into opening up some areas. I am not exactly sure of how that works in the way of the construction that is required. Until a proponent is finalised, we know that the work that has to be undertaken - well, we are instructed of the work that is going to be undertaken - we really cannot move until we know what is going to be done on the western side of the border. It is coming from the west to the east so, until we know what requirements are required on the western side of the border, we cannot really move forward until that is understood. Perhaps Mr Carroll would like to elaborate.

Mr MILLS: I do not necessarily need the elaboration, minister. Have native title issues been resolved on the Northern Territory side of the border?

Mr NATT: No, they have not.

Mr MILLS: Have any land planning issues been resolved on the Northern Territory side of the border?

Mr NATT: I understand they have not.

Mr MILLS: All of those matters have been attended to on the Western Australian side of the border. If we are waiting for a proponent, and a proponent says, 'Here we are, ready to go', it is going to take a hell of a long time to sort those issues out. Now, I tell you ...

Mr NATT: It is going to take a hell of a long time for the work to come across to the east as well.

Mr MILLS: Not necessarily.

Mr NATT: Oh, yes it will.

Mr MILLS: I have had meetings with minister Chance, and they are very concerned about the lack of activity on the Northern Territory side of the border on this matter - so much so, it puts the whole project under threat. Minister, we need more effort. In fact, I think news to hand is that, because of the lack of activity and synergy between one side of the border and the other, it looks like the project is being retarded in its capacity to achieve the objective of increasing food production at a time when we need to attend to these issues.

Mr NATT: Well, that is not quite right. We have asked the Western Australian government to provide the department with advice regarding the economic benefits on the expansion of the project into the Territory ...

Mr MILLS: When was that advice sought?

Mr NATT: I will ask Mr Carroll to elaborate on that.

Mr CARROLL: We went to Kununurra for an inspection in September of last year, and we met with senior officials from the Western Australian government at that time. As an aside, I mention that we observed that the Ord was being converted into sandalwood plantations and not food production. We were also advised that the sugar harvest we saw in progress there was the last one that would happen because the sugar mill was unviable. After that visit, we agreed, at that time, with Western Australian government officials, that we would continue to talk to each other. They gave us a briefing of their plans. I believe they were confidential, so I cannot give you the detail. However, the plan was to develop the Ord in stages. The stage that the Territory was at was at the very end of the process, not in the middle or at the beginning.

The latest information I have is a visit from senior officials from the Premier's department in WA in February/March of this year, when they advised us that the current status of the project then was that they were talking about infill rather than expansion - infill with new irrigation in areas that could be developed within the existing footprint - and that they were less ambitious in the proposed expansion than they were before. That is where I believe they are at, and that was the last communication we have had with them.

On our side, there are a number of issues. There are native title issues and, given the precedents that have been established on the Western Australian side, significant resources will be required to come to a conclusion. There are water discharge issues, and we have indicated to the Western Australian side that, should they proceed with their development, we will talk to them about water discharge from the development into the Northern Territory. That is being dealt with through NRETA.

The other issue for us is, for all the effort and expenditure that comes from the Territory, what benefit will there be for the Territory out of that? We have work being done at the moment, as I understand it, by the economists in the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development to assist us to come to a conclusion on that. That work is under way but, because of where Western Australia is at, the work has not become a higher priority. Mr Gobbey might have some more detail on that.

Mr MILLS: I would like to press a little further on this. Some of the deliberations from the Western Australian side centre on the size of the irrigation channels, for example. If there is no activity across the border, they will then, as you say, cut their cloth according to the measure they have been given, and there would be reduced capacity because they are only dealing with the Western Australian side, which then hampers the project. You have already indicated that it comes from the west to the east. The broader argument is, whatever side of the border the project is, the greater capacity is on the Territory side, but the water has to come from the west to the east. That, then, goes back to the size or the capacity of the channel to bring that water across. If we are not involved, and have none of the impediments cleared, the whole program is then retarded. The economic benefits would be the same consideration on the Western Australian side as our side - we are in this together. In fact, the greater capacity is on the Territory side. So, it seems like we really are just waiting and twiddling our thumbs and not being involved, and just marking time.

Mr CARROLL: There are two issues in response to that, member for Blain. The first one is, it is a decision for the government as to whether it wants to invest in a project, and whether the benefits come to the Territory and make a return on its investment. As I indicated, we are doing some work on that to assist

the government, but it has not been progressed. The second issue is that the information you are giving us today is not information that we have had from our contacts in Western Australia in recent times. I have met with them personally, both in Kununurra and in Darwin, and I have not had that message that we are causing problems.

Mr MILLS: All right. I am watching the media on the Western Australia side. I have met with Kim Chance, and with proponents in Kununurra. I am surprised that information is not flowing. If you read the papers in Western Australia, they certainly have a view of what is going on in the Northern Territory, and it is not favourable.

Mr CARROLL: We do read the papers but, without some sort of official communication and understanding of the official position of the Western Australian government, it is not appropriate for us to run around and do things - as they have not given it to us. Had they, well, we would have done the work.

Mr NATT: Member for Blain, were you aware of the money that was allocated by the Western Australian government back in May this year for the work that was to be undertaken there? Perhaps I can detail it a bit more.

In May of this year, Western Australian Regional Development Minister, John Ford, said that the Western Australian government would develop base infrastructure to enable the development of an additional 14 000 ha of land. This will include \$15m being spent on road infrastructure to enable the west bank area to be developed. Minister Ford announced that the development would be staged, including 1300 ha in the west bank area, 4000 ha in the Manteneea area, 8000 ha in the N2 area, plus possible development at the Packsaddle area. As part of the 2008-09 Western Australian state budget, continuing capital works projects were announced for the Ord River Irrigation Scheme of \$4.3m, and infrastructure works in the new conservation park to the value of \$200 000.

The previous call for expressions of interest did not result in a successful proponent. The Western Australian government is currently involved in assessing processes for private development on its side of the boarder, including environmental impacts. This has included discussions at officer level of various government departments.

Mr MILLS: How much has been allocated from the Territory government to attend to any issue - whether it is native title, land tender issues, or environmental issues - related to Ord Stage 2?

Mr NATT: I reiterate what I said before. There has been nothing allocated at this stage until we know where the Western Australians are going to go with the work that they are going to undertake on their side.

Mr MILLS: Who is your counterpart in Western Australia?

Mr NATT: Minister Jon Ford.

Mr MILLS: What is minister Kim Chance's role in Western Australia?

Mr NATT: I have been talking to minister Jon Ford who is actually the Western Australian Regional Development Minister, and they look after the Ord River area.

Mr MILLS: Are you aware, I believe there are three ministers, including the Premier, that have a task force that have focused their combined efforts - not just one minister, but the combined efforts, including the Premier - on issues related to ...

Mr NATT: I was aware there were two, Mr Chance and Mr Ford. I was unaware of the Premier. I was aware that there was a committee formed. As I said, I have been in contact with minister Ford.

Mr MILLS: It is a serious project on the Western Australia side, it does not appear to be reciprocated.

Mr NATT: They would like it to be a serious project, I am sure they would but, at this stage, they cannot get a proponent to do the work. That is why the Western Australia government is propping it up to do initial work to help it along.

Mr MILLS: There is so much to cover. I have plenty here but, unfortunately, I do not think we are going to get to it, but it has been good. I want to ask you a couple of questions on the internal and external

research project – biofuels. I am very interested in the project titled biofuels - DPIFM project, estimate \$82 000 ongoing. Could you give some details as to what is being considered in that biofuels project?

Mr NATT: We do have a biofuels project, I know for a fact. I visited the Katherine Research Farm. There are a number of crops being grown there for testing but, for further information, I will hand it to Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: It is true there is a strong interest in biofuels in the Territory. That is on the back of the world demand. At an officer level in the department, we probably receive around two inquiries a month from interested proponents. Currently, there are some research projects under way. I will touch on those, if I may. There is interest in cassava for ethanol production. We are doing some work there. Some very excellent wet tuber yields were recorded in 2007 - 52 ha after 12 months and 90 ha after 18 months of growth.

Long-term trials commenced in 2006-07 to examine African palm oil, as well as coconut and Pongamia at the Katherine Research Station and at Coastal Plains. The first yield measurements on those, because they are longer term, will not be available until 2010-11. However, the major crops of interest at the moment are soya bean and Pongamia. I will talk a little, if I may, about the soya bean project in a moment.

Out of those queries we have received, not all of them can proceed. For example, we had some proponents talk to us about Jatropha, which is for oil production. The oil production issue seemed reasonably promising and, at first glance, it may have been worthy of further investigation. However, the Jatropha is not a legal export into Australia because of the weediness, so my first ...

Mr MILLS: Because of the what, sorry?

Mr GOBBEY: Jatropha.

Mr MILLS: No, because of the ...?

Mr GOBBEY: Its weediness, its propensity to become naturalised in a weed. My first questions to the proponents were: what does the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service think about this, and what do my colleagues at NRETA think about it? They sought further advice from those sources and the project did not proceed because of the negative impacts it would have had on the environment. We do need to screen these things quite scrupulously.

We are doing some joint research with our colleagues in Queensland about Pongamia, which is a tree crop, I understand ...

Mr MILLS: From India.

Mr GOBBEY: ... which may be grown in the more marginal areas. We are not expecting any trials from there until 2009.

In relation to soya bean, we have been and continue to work with Energy Crops Australia, on land that they had direct control over, and land that they are working with individual producers on. Indeed, we are doing some trials at Katherine Research Station. The agronomics is difficult, we understand, particularly the weediness, insects, finding varieties that will grow in the Wet, together with the other issues associated with many industries in the northern part of Australia. That work is ongoing. Ultimately, it will be the decision of Energy Crops Australia whether they proceed with that work. Whilst they remain interested to establish a significant soya bean industry, we will work with them. There is a project team involving staff from the Crops, Forestry and Horticulture Division, and they coordinate work back through government to inform Energy Crops Australia. We are effectively working with them on this project, to save their time and resources, offering a one-stop shop for advice to and from government. So, yes, we are doing work on biofuels.

Mr NATT: I am happy to organise a brief on the work we do on biofuels at any time. There has been some good work done out there. Just on Pongamia, you said it was a native of India, it is actually a native Australian, it is grown extensively in India.

Mr MILLS: Oh, really? Interesting. I keep in touch with Mr Sullivan at Mataranka and I talk to Energy Crops Australia quite regularly, so, it is good to hear this report. Are they making a contribution to this research, minister?

Mr NATT: I understand that they have had some input. Perhaps Mr Gobbey would like to answer that a little more extensively.

Mr GOBBEY: As to the precise details of the project, Energy Crops Australia is spending a significant amount of their own money and effort, on the basis that any research from this work will become widely available to others. That is the general rule of thumb we apply; if it ends up in the public domain, we do that, by and large, as an internal project. That is not to say we do not explore getting additional funding from either industry or from research funding bodies. The staff input we are directly putting into this, if the intellectual property is available commonly, we see that as part of our contribution.

Mr MILLS: That is good to see. Has hemp been considered?

Mr GOBBEY: Relying on memory of a conversation in the last two months, there is interest in hemp production in the Territory. One of the early questions in discussions between my staff and senior staff from the Health department is to get advice on the crop from a Justice point of view, given the sensitivities around hemp, even if it is a low THC. I do not believe there are any issues around hemp for industrial purposes, provided it is low THC. Currently, I understand, at a national level, even low THC hemp cannot be used as an input into foods in Australia because of issues under the National Food Industry Strategy arrangements.

Mr NATT: Member for Blain, just to elaborate, there is some more information to hand. Yes, it has been considered but it does not grow as well up here as kenaf does. I understand that kenaf is a very similar product.

Mr MILLS: Therefore, the hemp that we do see in the Territory must grow somewhere else?

Mr NATT: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Okay, thank you for that, Mr Gobbey. There is a very curious line here. You said that that project is ongoing, so we just get updates over time. But there is a very interesting one. When MLA - Meat and Livestock Australia - are the funding body, does that mean that it is just a listing of research that they are doing that we do not have a share in? Going on what Mr Gobbey was saying, that if we have made a contribution we then are able to access that information?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to Mr Gobbey, he is across that area.

Mr GOBBEY: Meat and Livestock Australia work closely with the Pastoral Division of the Primary Industry group. MLA fund in excess of \$1m-worth of research a year, typically. The inputs from the department are in forms of our labour, our expertise and general availability of our research farms. Where MLA is listed, they would be spending growers funds, which are collected by the levy mechanism. It would be entirely normal that the product of MLA externally-funded research is commonly available to the industry within Australia.

Mr MILLS: Sadly, I am quite curious about one there, the risk management tool software development. The industry agreed to cease the project because of problems with the business model installed software. The software was there to help manage risk and the software failed, and the project looks like it has collapsed. That must be a bit of a disappointment. We do not really need to comment on that, I find it very curious. It set out on a grand endeavour with software to help manage the risk. Any comment, if there is a comment on that? It does look an odd situation.

Mr GOBBEY: Of course, many research projects, not all of them, come to a successful conclusion. It is better for the levy-funded organisation and ourselves to take the risk rather than have individual producers carry that risk.

Mr MILLS: We all have heard that saying that it is better to have tried and failed than not tried at all. Okay, so we will forget that risk management software; it looks like it is not a goer. Tons of other things to talk about. I would have liked to have talked about the peanuts and how you were able to clear the way for peanuts and the like. There are a couple of fishing things from me.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.3

Mr NATT: Madam Deputy Chair, before we close this item, I have an answer to the question from the member for Blain, question on notice No 7.3. The question was a request for comparable data on food production by sector over the last five years. I have that information here, which I am happy to table. It is interesting to note that, just on the horticulture production from 2003-04, it was \$87.7m; to 2008-09, \$169m.

Mr MILLS: That is good news.

Mr NATT: In the fishing production area, \$128m to \$146m; and from the cattle and livestock, \$253m to \$258m. So overall, a growth of \$469m to \$574m.

Mr MILLS: Could I assume that, with fishing, aquaculture would be included in those figures?

Mr NATT: Yes, it is.

Mr MILLS: Good. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions on Output 1.2, Primary Industry? That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Output 1.3 – Fisheries

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY MANAGEMENT

Output 2.2 – Fisheries

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: I now call for questions on Output 1.3, Fisheries. Minister, are you agreeable to take Output 1.3, Fisheries and Output 2.2, Fisheries together?

Mr NATT: I am, Madam Deputy Chair, yes.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Okay, just for ease. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Yes, first question is about the barra net buy-backs. Where are you at with those, minister?

Mr NATT: We have advanced to the point where I have asked the department to give me some information on various aspects of the barra netting in and around the coast of the Northern Territory. That information has been provided to me and I will be making a decision within the next fortnight to three weeks.

Mr MILLS: Right. Just in time for the election, would you suggest, minister?

Mr NATT: Not necessarily. It is not an easy exercise to look at the various aspects of the buy-back. You have to take into account the number of licences there, the amount of effort in the areas that the effort is being undertaken; so there is a heavily involved process. Our first priority was to buy-back coastal net licences and, as you know, we bought back nine of the 15 coastal net licences. We have closed off Darwin Harbour and Shoal Bay. Let us face it, that is where heavy traffic for recreational anglers is targeted, so that was our first priority. We did that earlier this year, 1 February, if I recall. Now, our next priority is to buy-back some barra net licences. That work has been undertaken and I currently have that before me.

Mr MILLS: How many are you considering buying back in this next phase, second priority?

Mr NATT: I have the information there. I am looking to see what information is provided, then I will make a decision on that and take that to Cabinet.

Mr MILLS: That mysterious information, is it going to be narrowed down a little to the number of licences that are being considered?

Mr NATT: Well, election promises made at the last election were that we would buy back three licences. I am hoping that, from the information that is provided to me, that is a possibility. However, again, I will have to go through the information and then make some recommendations.

Mr MILLS: To?

Mr NATT: To Cabinet.

Mr MILLS: Cabinet. Okay. In two weeks?

Mr NATT: Two to three weeks I am hoping that it will be finalised, yes.

Mr MILLS: All right. Is it just like a natural – you said we are advancing at a rate of a snail, perhaps, but it is just about ready for – what? - three or four weeks that you will have it ready. Is it just ready now or is it being pushed along a bit?

Mr NATT: No. In all honesty, the work has just come to me within the last fortnight. I am currently considering the recommendations.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. Next question is regarding bag limits. Given that AFANT has a position on bag limits, which is to see them effectively reduced, what is government's position on bag limits, and when are you to make a response to AFANT on that matter?

Mr NATT: I actually spoke with AFANT on Tuesday of this week. We have discussed that. At this stage, we feel that the overall fish stocks are healthy. However, should the science show that the stocks are under threat in any way, shape or form, then we will act. It is fair to say, the amount of work and research that is undertaken by the department is huge. Just look at the Barracade; the jewfish study that was undertaken on the movement, migration and the breeding patterns of the species; the growth rates of the jewfish, which is a fast-growing fish; we are about to undertake a survey of recreational anglers; and we keep a very close look at the commercial logbooks as well. We do have our finger on the pulse; we know what the fish stocks are like out there at the moment, and they are very healthy. As I said, if the science should change, well, we will jump on to it very quickly.

Mr MILLS: That is fine. So, at this point, no change?

Mr NATT: At this point there is no change.

Mr MILLS: In the next couple of weeks there will be a change, perhaps, as we are going to Cabinet and having a discussion about it?

Mr NATT: At this point, there is no change.

Mr MILLS: Today, like, even at this point? We are running out of time and getting a bit tired, so cherubim in the Daly River?

Mr WOOD: Freshwater prawn, that is an upmarket word.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Order!

Mr MILLS: Okay, freshwater prawns in the river. They are getting hammered. Do you have a response to the concerns that people are raising about the catching of these freshwater critters?

Mr NATT: The Daly is a, I guess for the want of a better word, recreational fishing mecca. I understand there are a number of concerns within the Daly that have been expressed by AFANT, and one of those concerns is most definitely the cherubim. Again, I have asked my department to have a look at that for me. That will come into consideration in the not-too-distant future when we look at the overall stock assessment of the Daly River.

Mr MILLS: What research is being conducted on that matter now?

Mr NATT: There is no research being undertaken, as I understand, actually on the cherubim. Is that what you are talking about, the cherubim?

Mr MILLS: Yes.

Mr NATT: There is no actual research being undertaken, but we are aware of the concentration of effort that has been put into catching cherubim. I have asked my department for some information on that. It needs to be looked at and we will work on that. We are conducting a survey of recreational anglers. We will be spending \$200 000 per year over the next two years, to work with the recreational anglers to see what is being caught, get feedback from recreational anglers to see what can be done. From that

information we gather, we can make some decisions on whether it be bag limits for cherubim, all those sorts of areas. It is going to be done right across the top, the northern coast.

Mr MILLS: When will that be completed?

Mr NATT: At the end of June 2010. It will start towards the end of this year and carry through to the end of next year, 2009, and the results will be known in 2010.

Mr MILLS: So, we will let the cherubim know, just hang in there for a couple more years.

Mr NATT: Yes, hang in there.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Last one, the Palmerston boat ramp. It has been kicked around since 1999. I understand that that matter now rests with the Territory government from the Palmerston City Council. A game was played there for some time, the ball has been kicked into your court now. Please do not tell me that it is another minister's issue, it is recreational fishing. Can you advise us where government is with access for recreational fishers in Palmerston at the Palmerston boat ramp?

Mr NATT: As you know, the Northern Territory government gave the Palmerston City Council \$150 000 a couple of years ago to undertake some work at the Palmerston boat ramp. They did a survey report on the ramp. They felt that the money required was not enough. I believe they spent around \$30 000 to \$40 000 on that report. That came to a stalemate for some time, to the point where the Palmerston City Council now have handed the remainder of the money back to the Northern Territory government. We are currently working with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to see what can be done with the Palmerston boat ramp.

Mr MILLS: Do you think there might be something done, announced or described in the next few weeks or a month?

Mr NATT: I am unaware of that. There is work being undertaken with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure to see what work is required there. You are saying that it comes under recreational fishing. Well, that is not quite correct. We do not have any expertise on boat ramps, so we have to work as closely as we can with Department of Planning and Infrastructure on what can be done there.

Mr MILLS: Yes, left hand and right hand but, ultimately, it is a facility for recreational fishing. They do not just produce these things and see whether you would like them. Anyway, that will do. You have an Alice Springs fishing question?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr NATT: I am keen to improve it. It is a valuable facility that has been let go a little. I would like to see some work done, most definitely upgrading the ramp. We had the announcement of the Hudson Creek boat ramp, the work that we are doing there. It is a valuable resource for us and I would like to see it taken further.

Mr WOOD: Can I just tag on to the boat ramp issue? I realise, you can say it is Lands and Planning, but it is always mentioned at AFANT meetings, so you must have some knowledge of these things, minister. Is the government looking at an alternative access to the Howard River since the Howard River boat ramp was closed? It used to be Dixies. You could hire a boat from there and, now, a private developer has gone in there. There is no public access to the mouth of the Howard River via a boat ramp any more. Has your department looked at promoting, through government, the building of a new boat ramp there?

Mr NATT: Off the top of my head, I am unaware of any. Perhaps Ms Brayford would like to elaborate.

Ms BRAYFORD: Heather Brayford, Executive Director, Fisheries. Certainly, the building of a new boat ramp at that area has not been identified as a high priority. We have a working group, which includes AFANT, which is looking at priorities for those sorts of things, and that one has not been identified as a priority through that group.

Mr NATT: There has been \$1m allocated to infrastructure for recreational fishing. There is a fishing access working group that manages that \$1m to find out what the priorities are. I am happy to raise it with the committee if you wish.

Mr WOOD: It would be good, because it happened very quickly. You did a deal with some company - I think they are made up of locals – who are going to build a resort there. But, there is no public boat ramp in that area for access to Howard River and it has been a very popular area. It does have a problem, there are no gazetted roads in that area, so you might find there are some other costs that might go with it.

Mr CARROLL: As Chair of the Recreational Fishing Access Working Group, I will take on notice the member for Nelson's concerns, and we will make sure it is considered in the consultation process at the next meeting, which includes AFANT.

Mr NATT: As you know, we did some work at Buffalo Creek in and around that area. We would be keen to have a look at it if it is going to assist recreational fishing.

Mr WOOD: Howard River is very popular, and the only other way to get there is for people in the rural area and Palmerston to go all the way up to Buffalo Creek.

Minister, the other one on boat ramps is that I gather there is a second contract out for the boat ramp out at Channel Point. I am trying to find out what happened to the first boat ramp. Was it not made properly?

Mr NATT: The second contract has been let. I understand that the work on the ramp is close to being finished. It was well down the track. It was supposed to be finished before the end of the Dry, I am pretty sure, but I reckon it is probably further advanced than that. The work that was undertaken on the first boat ramp was of poor quality and had to be redone, basically.

Mr WOOD: I suppose I cannot ask you who paid for that if the first one was no good. Do you know if there was any comeback from the poor quality boat ramp?

Mr NATT: It was not out of our budget.

Mr WOOD: I am making a presumption here in relation to aquaculture. We have barramundi, crabs and prawns. A lot of those fish - if you can call them that just for the sake of putting them altogether - would be fed on feedstock. One of my favourite subjects is feedlotting. Is the effect of increased prices in feed starting to affect the viability of some of these aquaculture products?

Mr NATT: I will hand that to Ms Brayford.

Ms BRAYFORD: I do not have any specific information on that, but nutrition continues to be an essential consideration in development within the industry. We are working through our research people with our aquatic animal health people to look at ways of improving and enhancing feed, and try to get that through the system in terms of viability for the industry. It is a very important issue, and the health issues associated with that for the fish are quite critical.

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you also give us a rundown of the health of that industry? I have heard that the barramundi farm at the Adelaide River is struggling. I am not sure how the prawn farm is going at Blackmore. There was talk about someone perhaps buying the old barramundi farm at Bathurst Island. I have heard lots of stories of ups and downs at the present time. Are you able to give us some idea of the good stories and the bad stories in the industry at the moment?

Mr NATT: Yes, there have been some ups and downs. The Northern Territory aquaculture industry was valued at approximately \$24.6m in 2006-07. This was an increase of \$1.4m over 2005-06. The prawn sector posted record production, with a value of \$2.25m in 2006-07, up \$600 000 from 2005-06. Prawn production in the Territory will reduce to zero in 2007-08 as one of the producing farms has converted to barramundi production. It is fair to say that, because of the import of prawns from overseas, the price is just not there in local prawns any more, which is unfortunate.

Mr WOOD: Is that the Blackmore River farm?

Mr NATT: I am unsure of that. It is. Yes, it is, that is coming from the back.

Farmed barramundi production fell from 1000 tonnes, valued at \$8.5m in 2005-06, to just over 400 tonnes, valued at \$3.2m in 2006-07, due to the closure of the large cage at Bathurst Island. Local pond-based farms increased production during this period, partially offsetting the loss of production of the sea farm on the Tiwi Islands.

Pearl production increased significantly during 2006-07, \$18m compared to \$14.8m in 2005-06, and the industry is still feeling the impacts of the recent cyclones. Production is expected to increase in the coming years.

The Northern Territory government, through the Darwin Aquaculture Centre, has assisted the development of sea cucumbers, which is a new one on the horizon, through the leasing of an area at DAC for a pilot hatchery and the provision of technical support.

The department has also assisted in the establishment of the demonstration mud crab farm at Kulaluk, a community in Darwin. Strong financial assistance was obtained from the federal government for the community's project, with the DAC providing technical advice on juvenile crabs for the project, similar to Maningrida, with the assessment of the establishment of appropriate aquaculture ventures in those areas. It is fair to say that Kulaluk has been having some trouble. It is mainly due to power supplies.

Maningrida have also had some problems out there with the locality of their farm and the netting processes that are involved. However, the department is having one last trial out there to see how it goes, and then it is a decision for the local people to find out where they want to take it from there. Again, for the grow out of the juvenile crabs from DAC, we have been providing them with those. Departmental officers support the industry through case management of aquaculture proposals.

I make mention of the great work they are doing at the Aquaculture Farm. They have actually just started a new venture on clams. They are growing out clams now. The science that has been undertaken out at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre is quite amazing. Let us hope that the value to the industry will be seen in the not-too-distant future.

Mrs MILLER: I might have missed it, but did you release any barramundi fingerlings this last 12 months?

Mr NATT: I will ask my Executive Director of Fisheries to answer that question.

Mrs MILLER: If you did, where?

Ms BRAYFORD: I do not have the precise dates and details of the releases, but if there were it would only be to Manton Dam.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. You do not know how many?

Ms BRAYFORD: Just bear with me. Sorry, I do not have the exact figures, but we could certainly provide those.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Would you like that on notice, member for Katherine?

Mrs MILLER: No, I just know that is the only ...

Ms BRAYFORD: Manton Dam.

Mrs MILLER: Manton Dam. I just needed to know where they had gone.

In relation to boat ramps - and they seem like a hot topic, and I notice that Mr Carroll is on the recreational fishermen advisory as well - there has been a lot of concern expressed by recreational anglers. I am talking about mainly the grey nomads that arrive from down south with their tinnies on their vehicles and want to put them in the Katherine River, the Victoria River, the Roper or somewhere, but mainly near Katherine. They just want to put it in the river and go and catch some fish. They have one place, and that is underneath the Katherine High Level Bridge, which really does need some upgrading. However, there is no other location along the river south of there between us and the Victoria River Crossing where there is a proper, environmentally friendly boat ramp. Are there any plans to put one there?

Mr NATT: I am unaware of any plans but, through the Fishing Access Working Group, I am sure that we can bring it to their attention. Just going back to boat ramps, talking about the one under the bridge, I know the Department of Planning and Infrastructure are currently undertaking an audit of all boat ramps. I am sure that boat ramp will be looked at and, if there is any work that needs to be done, that can be included in the budgetary requirements for the work that is required.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it certainly needs something done to it, that is for sure. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions?

Mr WOOD: Just one on that, minister. Have you ever given consideration to looking at whether we can have more jetties around Darwin Harbour as an alternative place for people to enjoy recreational fishing without having to own a boat? We have the one at the wharf. A lot of people would say that it was poorly designed, because the fish are there and the are the fish are in is over here. A lot of kids like to go fishing off the pier. The only alternative is Mandorah, and that is not the best place because of the ships and boats coming in.

Mr NATT: Nightcliff.

Mr WOOD: I just do not know whether some consideration – Nightcliff, yes, sorry – even in the general area of the harbour, just to open up the place for people to enjoy a little fishing.

Mr NATT: I must say, nothing has been brought to my attention by the groups that I meet with, but ...

Mr WOOD: They probably all own boats.

Mr NATT: Yes, they probably do. One of the areas we are looking at is part of the proposal for the Palmerston boat ramp for the Elizabeth River.

Mr WOOD: The floating boat ramp ...

Mr NATT: Sorry?

Mr WOOD: You have the floating pontoon.

Mr NATT: The floating pontoon, that is right.

Mr WOOD: They might be an option.

Mr NATT: If there is a suitable place for one to be placed, I am sure that we would have a look at it if it is brought to our attention.

Mr WOOD: Okay.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: Any further questions? All right.

Mr MILLS: Hang on.

Mrs MILLER: You have one, have you?

Mr MILLS: Yes, we want to ask a couple of generics on that one.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We are finishing at 10 past so you have about 59 seconds.

Mr MILLS: Yes, we should be finished by that time. Could you give us a list of the executives in the department, both executive contract, non-contract, how many of these executives have personal assistants, executive assistants, executive information coordinators, or administrative assistants? Are there any executives with more than one support person in any of these roles?

Mrs MILLER: You got it in.

Mr MILLS: You can table it if you wish.

Mr CARROLL: Given that the question was very fast and I might miss something, perhaps if I table some documents that might assist in answering your question, member for Blain?

Mr MILLS: Indeed, thank you.

Mr CARROLL: The documents that I will ask the minister to table are staffing numbers by group and region as at 31 May; staffing and classification by level as at 31 May; personal assistants in DPIFM by the position plus who has a personal assistant - but not by name.

Mr MILLS: No, that is all right.

Mr CARROLL: We also have a list of the executive officers who provide administrative support to make all the things happen, like research and all of that sort of stuff.

Mr MILLS: You have extraordinary hearing. Next question is the efficiency dividend of 3%. What is that in dollar terms for this department?

Mr CARROLL: We will ask the Chief Financial Officer for those.

Mr HO: Bernard Ho, Chief Financial Officer. The efficiency dividend applied to the 2008-09 Budget year is 3%, or approximately \$1.3m.

Mr MILLS: Did you say 2% or 3%?

Mr HO: 3%.

Mr MILLS: 3%, yes.

Mr HO: This is offset by the application of 4% for the EBA on the personnel budget, and 3.4% CPI on purchases of goods and services, which equates to approximately \$1.62m, giving a total nett increase of \$300 000 to the agency.

Mr MILLS: Oh, really? With all the comings and goings, with the efficiency dividend, you end up with more. Thank you.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: The time for questions for this department has finished. That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.3, Output Group 2.2 and the Non-output Specific Budget-Related Questions. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers who have provided the advice to the minister today, and also thank the minister for his attendance. I also note our thanks for answering all those questions on notice before we finished the session. Well done.

The committee suspended.
