

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

In committee in continuation:

MINISTER VATSKALIS' PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRY, FISHERIES AND MINES

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I call to order this session of estimates. I welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, with me is John Carroll, the CEO of the department; Richard Sellers, Director of Mines and Energy; and Bernard Ho, the Finance Officer. Yes, I would like to make an opening statement.

As you aware, my department was established in July 2005. It plays a key role on behalf of government in facilitating development and providing appropriate regulatory frameworks to further the Territory's vital industry sectors of Primary Industry, Fisheries, and Minerals and Energy. The combined value of these three sectors in the Northern Territory in 2004 was estimated to be \$3.5bn, and it continues to grow.

With Minerals and Energy, we had a record \$67.9m spend on mineral exploration in the Northern Territory during 2005, which was an increase of 13.9% on 2004. I anticipate this figure will continue to grow - certainly that is our purpose. We are currently undergoing a resource boom and we are prepared to promote the Territory to ensure we cash in on this resource boom. That is why we developed the Top End Secret, a travelling road show to promote the Territory, with great results. In addition to that, we have developed a \$15.2m exploration investment attraction program, given the Territory's resources base which will produce physical data, information, and statistics which will be made available to all potential explorers at nil cost.

Currently there are 748 granted mineral exploratory licences in the Northern Territory, covering approximately 220 000 km². We have a 250% increase in the take-up rate of geoscience data over the past 12 months, and an 85% increase in new exploration applications. We have issued 300 authorisations under the *Mining Management Act* over the past five years, of which 70 are for extractive operations. We have 10 onshore petroleum exploration permits now granted, and 31 applications for exploration permits.

Fisheries has a combined value of \$63m a year and employ 1500 people. We have a combination of wild fisheries and aquaculture. Aquaculture is projected to grow to \$40m a year by 2008-09 from the current value of \$22m. The pearling industry is also expected to grow by 10% to 20% over the next four or five years.

In Primary Industry, the pastoral industry is doing very well in the Northern Territory. We predict an increase of 30% in production over the next three years and 54% by 2014. We expect to export nearly 200 000 head of cattle during 2006-07. I am really concerned that our market is only one market, mainly Indonesia. That is why we are working very closely with the industry to identify new markets to promote the Territory live cattle export. Local level of production is approximately \$12m from 60 growers.

The forestry industry is growing, with hardwood pulp species on Melville Island and African mahogany in the Daly region.

Primary Industry works very hard to develop the pastoral industry in the Northern Territory; continued participation in the multi-agency Indigenous Pastoral Program, which attempts to increase indigenous participation in the pastoral and horticultural industries; and we have also implemented the National Livestock Identification System in 2003, to trace count within the next 12 months.

This is a very brief presentation about my department. I acknowledge the hard work of all the people in my department. I have to say it is great to work with people who have a solid scientific base who have developed over the past give years, excellent relations with the pastoral industry, fisheries and minerals and energy.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. A little housekeeping before we go into questions. I propose to have a five minute break at 11 am this morning to give ourselves a chance to stretch our legs, and if anyone needs to have a quick smoke. Also, I ask all witnesses please, because Hansard is having

real problems, for the purpose of *Hansard*, to state your title and name. I ask all members and ministers to address all questions and responses through the Chair. Thank you. Are there any questions? Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: No, thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mrs MILLER: No, thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr WOOD: No, thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – RESOURCE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT
Output 1.1 – Minerals and Energy

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Resource Industry Development, Output 1.1, Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, perhaps I should have asked this when you asked me if I had a question before. Minister, we have four-and-a-half hours with you and you have three portfolios. We also had four-and-a-half hours with the Chief Minister, who has more portfolios; four-and-a-half hours with minister Toyne, who has three, but significant, portfolios of Health and Attorney-General. Is it your view that, in order for a satisfactory estimates process, you would need more or less time for adequate scrutiny of the budget in relation to your portfolios?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, this a question for the PAC. I understand that they are looking at that matter and will be trying to address it in the coming year. Do you still want to answer the question?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman, it is four-and-a-half hours, up to you, Leader of the Opposition, to actually use this time efficiently to ask the questions you want to ask. I am happy to answer within this period of time.

Ms CARNEY: You are always so forthcoming with your views, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, that is why we are ministers at the moment, and you do not like it very much.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. It has been run by the members of the PAC. It will be addressed.

Mr KNIGHT: You are wasting time.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, member for Daly?

Mr KNIGHT: You are wasting time – your time.

Ms CARNEY: Thick as ever.

Minister, can you take me through Budget Paper No 3, page 223. Why has there been a reduction to the budget of Minerals and Energy?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I have Bernard Ho to provide you a detailed explanation of the budget, which is not really a reduction.

Mr HO: Mr Bernard Ho, Chief Financial Officer. The revised estimate for 2005-06 is \$10m, and that has gone down to \$9.96m for 2006-07. The variation is only \$0.1m, which is made up of a number of items. Currently, there is \$80 000 relating to external funding from Vista Gold for the rehabilitation and management of the Mt Todd mine site. There is also an increase of \$82 000 for the nett effect of parameters supplied to the CPI deficiency dividend. There is a reduction of \$374 000 relating to the rehabilitation and management of the Mt Todd mine site. Vista Gold will contribute \$188 000 in the first half of 2006-07 and we will take over management of the site from January 2007. There is also a reduction of \$13 000 relating to the redistribution of corporate overheads resulting from the DBERD split in July 2005, so the nett, in fact, is only a small variation.

Ms CARNEY: However, it is, nevertheless, a reduction, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe Bernard explained very well what these variations are. It might be a reduction on paper, in figures, but the reality is there are a number of factors affecting these reductions. It is not really a reduction; it is moving money around, as we do all the time, and I will be having the same argument every time about the budget being the same or being reduced.

Ms CARNEY: See the minus figure next to the figure of \$692 000, Budget Paper 3, page 223. That is a reduction, is it not?

Mr VATSKALIS: The variation, less \$692 000, was explained in detail by Bernard Ho. It was detailed because you can see the variation relates to the Commonwealth Renewable Remote Energy, the CPI efficiency dividend and \$1.1m increase in funding of the Commonwealth Renewable Remote Energy. It is money moving around, and certainly, during the year, monies are moving around for various reasons. Again, in the budget paper it appears like a reduction, but the reality is there are reasons for that deduction, or the so-called perceived reduction.

Ms CARNEY: If it had a plus sign in front of that figure, would you still describe it as money moving around, or ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Ms CARNEY: ... would you describe that as a government increase?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. I would not describe it as an increase because it is detailed. We can explain it. If it was a plus sign before it, I would say that is a variation and that is why this appears to be an increase in the budget. We are not here to hide, we are here to give you an accurate picture of what is happening with our budget.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, that is certainly the case. I just note your reluctance to call a minus figure a deduction. However, part of the reason I asked, of course, of the many reasons why I asked that question, you tabled this document in parliament last week. I will have some questions in relation to it. On the first page, which bears your very handsome picture ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: ... it says on the final paragraph: 'The Territory is open for business and this handbook will help you find the right people', etcetera. I am just wondering what sort of signal it sends to the mining industry when you say in this brochure: 'The Territory is open for business' and, yet, in your own budget figures - whether you call it a variation or not - there has, in fact, been a reduction in the budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe people in the industry are pretty well aware and familiar with accounting practices, and they can see very clearly if there is a real reduction in our budget or not. If they ask for the information, we will provide it. Again, as I said before, you can call it a reduction. The reality is, there is also the money from the Commonwealth Renewable Remote Power Generation Program, where funds were received in 2004-05 and spent in 2005-06. The \$1.8m appears in the 2004-05 budget, but it was spent in 2005-06. Really, you bring the budget out in 2004-05 and, then in 2005-06, you get this money provided by the Commonwealth, so it appears as a reduction. I know you have to ask these questions to show that we have addressed it in our budget, but let us be fair here, and let us work together to promote the Territory without actually trying to nit pick and show outsiders that the Territory reduced the budget for the department. The Territory has not reduced the budget for the department, full stop.

Ms CARNEY: It is interesting that you described as nit picking questions in relation to your government's figures in relation to budgets. Nice try, minister. Nice spin, but it will not work.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you have a question, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: We will ask questions in relation to pluses or minuses, if you do not mind.

Mr VATSKALIS: And we are prepared to give you the answers, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Moving on - and I will probably come back to this document - how many exploration licences were issued by your department in the last 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: Do you want to discuss it now, because it has not really started, or we can go to the right output to discuss that point?

Ms CARNEY: Oh, sorry. I thought it was in this output because – there was a logical reason.

Mr VATSKALIS: The next one.

Ms CARNEY: The next one is it? No, this one, development. Is granting licences not Resource Industry Development?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is a regular activity. I am happy to respond to that, I do not have a problem.

Ms CARNEY: I guess it would equally apply to both, do you think?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have a problem with that one.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you please address your questions through the Chair.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, Mr Deputy Chairman. We are happy to provide this information. I do not have a problem with that.

Ms CARNEY: Yes. I note from last year, minister, that this question was asked in this output area.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is fine. Okay. The minister will address the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. This is the number of mineral exploration applications. Currently, we have 592 outstanding applications for an exploration licence and 219 granted mineral application licences on Aboriginal freehold land. Out of the 592 outstanding applications, 168 have been refused consent to grant mineral leasehold under a moratorium for a period of up to five years. To date in 2005-06, there have been 29 grants for an exploration licence on Aboriginal land and these applications are currently pending grant. Overall, as I said in my opening address, we have issued 300 authorisations over the past five years, of which 70 are for extractive operations, and a number of onshore petroleum operations, and 31 applications for exploration permits. There are currently 740 granted application licences issued in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: The first figure you said was 592 ...

Mr VATSKALIS: That is in Aboriginal - sorry.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, can I finish? ... 592 were outstanding. Why were they outstanding?

Mr VATSKALIS: There are 592 outstanding applications for mineral exploration licences, because they have to go through a process, especially if they are to be issued on Aboriginal freehold land. These are currently being processed appropriately. The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia with no backlog on exploration licences or mining licence permission.

Ms CARNEY: Can you take me through the process? When was the first of those 592 lodged? How long does it take? Five hundred and ninety-two is a lot.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Sellers can explain the process the department is going through. The department uses expedited procedures to process applications on Aboriginal land in particular. Today, we have very good cooperation from the land councils. We had no objections when that process started. I will let Mr Sellers explain the process.

Mr SELLERS: Richard Sellers, Executive Director, Minerals and Energy. There are two aspects to the question that I would like to address. One is that the amount of time it takes depends on how well the negotiations go. In one of the recent examples, Bootu Creek, the expedited process from time of lodgement to time of being able to start was only nine months. That was an excellent example where it went very smoothly, the negotiations were amicable and reached an early resolution. Others take considerably more time, depending on how the negotiations go. Under the standard process, the time lines are set out very clearly in legislation where they have a certain amount of time to do each step. That component is probably best addressed with a written statement as I would not want to miss a step in that legislative process. If you would like that, we can provide that for you.

Ms CARNEY: No, that is all right, thank you. I believe you said you were going to answer in two parts?

Mr SELLERS: Sorry. The expedited process was the one where I used the example of a short process. When it is not going through the expedited process, that is where I was saying that the steps are well and clearly spelled out in the legislative process and I was suggesting that if we wanted to table that we would need to go and just do a written example of that.

Ms CARNEY: What is the standard time frame for an application? You said nine months was pretty good and, I gather, a bit unusual. What is the standard time frame?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll can answer that.

Mr CARROLL: John Carroll, Chief Executive of the department. I can address the question. There are two processes for mineral exploration licences. It is either on pastoral or freehold land, or on *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* land. On pastoral or freehold land, you go through the native title process, and that is where the expedited process kicks in. On ALRA land, there are specific processes in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*. One of the crucial ones is the right of traditional owners to refuse the right for access. The point there is that there are a number that have been on the books that we have had for probably 25, 30 years, because traditional owners have the right to put a moratorium on the consideration of a licence application for a period of five years, and some of those have just rolled over time and time again. It is not within the department's control at all.

Where it is within our control, we move as fast as we can to expedite licence applications, for a number of reasons, including the policy objective of ensuring that we turn land over, so that if an explorer does not find anything, the land is available for other people to have a look. They might find another mineral or look in the different way, as geologists do.

Ms CARNEY: Through you, Mr Chairman. Mr Carroll, the reason I am looking at your feet is that I said to the Chief Minister the other night, I do not mind seeing her trip politically but I was concerned that her feet were being caught up in cabling. Yours are at great risk of doing the same thing and I ask the Secretary to pull that cable out. I asked for it to be taped up the other day but we have got away with doing it in front. Either you were going to fall when you got up, or that microphone was going to go for six. Thanks, Mr Secretary.

Mr CARROLL: Mr Chairman, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her attention to occupational health and safety, because it is a very big issue for my department.

Ms CARNEY: I can assure you I do not have a foot fetish, although I gather some people do. But not this little black duck.

Mr VATSKALIS: Leader of the Opposition, there are different situations. Bootu Creek is a good example of how things went very quickly, and it is an example we have to showcase for the Territory. The other is that sometimes you have difficulties. In other states, in particular in Western Australia, they found out that it is very difficult to process their mineral and mining applications because of the difference in the claim regime. In the Northern Territory we have small claims, and they can be processed very quickly because the if there is a risk it can be identified. However, if you go to Western Australia, in the Pilbara or the Kimberley's, the claims are enormous, and there are a number of traditional owners who have to be consulted before an application is granted.

For your information, in 2005-06, we had 424 new applications for mineral exploration licences and two new applications for onshore petroleum exploration. That indicates that we have turned the corner in mineral exploration licences since 1997, when the Territory went down in mineral applications. However, there are a number of reasons for that. Now it seems the Territory, once again, is becoming a destination for mineral exploration.

Ms CARNEY: We will come to McArthur River before too long, minister. I gather that when a company or, indeed, an individual makes an application for an exploration licence, that there is no requirement for them to stipulate what they are looking for? Is that true?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. Our legislation does not require them to stipulate what they are looking for. You apply for a generic mineral exploration application. I believe it is quite right because, even if you are looking for, let us say, zinc, you might find gold. Instead of specifying what you are looking for, people should be able to find what they find.

Ms CARNEY: The department has various geological information, so I guess when an application is made for a certain area, people would say we know what they are looking for, it might be gold, uranium, whatever - correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: It depends on the company. Our geological information is provided free of charge so people can access it, either via the Internet themselves, or they can get the CD or they can get the notes, and we are happy to provide them free of charge.

Ms CARNEY: However, your department, and presumably you as minister, would have a fair idea of which company was looking for what, based on where they were looking?

Mr VATSKALIS: To give you an example, Arafura Resources was looking for superphosphates and found them, but with the superphosphates they also found rare earths in uranium. People would not necessarily look for a particular element, they would look for something. The Territory is a unique geology, and what you find, you find in big quantities or mixed with other elements. Our maps are geological maps. I am not a geologist, but people who can understand geological maps can see very well what is in the ground.

Ms CARNEY: The fact is, is it not, that you, as minister, would have a fair idea of which companies, for instance, were looking for uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: Once again, yes, we know there are a number of companies looking for uranium in the Northern Territory. The reason we are know these companies are looking for uranium in the Northern Territory is because they are international companies that deal with uranium only, like Cameco. Cameco has been here for 20 years seeking uranium. However, I am pretty sure if they will find something else they will be happy to offload it to another company that is, let us say, looking for our oil.

Ms CARNEY: In parliament on 30 March this year, your Chief Minister said,:

The issue with uranium mining is a complex one. The Labor Party has a policy that has been in place for a number of years now, which is about no new mines.

Do you appreciate the inconsistency, from government's point of view, that companies make applications for exploration, you know what they are looking for and, yet, your government's position is no new mines? Do you think that is odd?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to answer that question, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. The Chief Minister reiterated the policy of the national Labor Party. The national Labor Party has a current policy on uranium of no new mines, and that is what she and I have reiterated. The Leader of the Opposition is very well aware that no Territory government has control over uranium. Under the *Northern Territory (Self-government) Act*, uranium control rests solely with the Commonwealth. Not only that, but should somebody apply to open a uranium mine, application, yes, is made to the minister for Mines in the Northern Territory, but the minister for Mines has to put the application before the Commonwealth minister for Resources. By Northern Territory law, the minister for Mines in the Northern Territory has to comply with the decision of the federal minister. Therefore, if tomorrow Cameco discovers uranium, let us say, in Tennant Creek and applied to me to open a uranium mine, I have to advise the Commonwealth minister about the finding and the application. Should the federal minister say yes, I have no option but to agree to it. If the federal minister says no, I have no option but to accept his decision. This has been the case all along since 1978; there is nothing new.

Ms CARNEY: That may well be the case, minister, and it has proven to be extremely convenient for your government. I believe I made the comment when I saw you with Ian Macfarlane skipping along outside the parliament, both of you looking as happy as Larry.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you have a question, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: My question is: yes, uranium mining requires that the federal government must have a role, but the Northern Territory government has a role to play, does it not, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. We made it clear to minister Macfarlane that we would like to continue the regulatory regime, such as we have with ERA in Jabiru, and I believe he is very happy. Leader of the Opposition, yes, I have a very good relationship with minister Macfarlane, and it has helped the Northern

Territory many times. I do not have to fight with him the same way I do not have to fight with the shadow minister for Mines or Fisheries. I have a good relationship with the member for Katherine. We do not contact each other all the time. With minister Macfarlane, on many occasions when I spoke to him and discussed issues for the Northern Territory, he was very helpful. I intend to continue my friendly relationship with minister Macfarlane. I can say, I do not have the same relationship with some other ministers, especially the ex-minister for Fisheries. However, I believe Mr Macfarlane has done very well for the Northern Territory and I continue to be friends with him.

Ms CARNEY: I believe you are really good friends, minister, based on the expediency of the position.

Mr VATSKALIS: And the Alcan development and other developments in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Both you and the Chief Minister have indicated that the federal Labor Party's position may change at the next Labor confidence, but you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your question, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman, I am getting to it. Over the last four days, we have been allowed preambles. Are you wanting to do things differently?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, but we have a lot of questions to get through, and I am sure that other members would like to ask questions. I am just asking you to get to the point, that is all.

Ms CARNEY: And I will get to the point, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: Let us start again, minister. You and the Chief Minister have indicated that the position with respect to uranium mining will be revisited at the next Labor Party conference. As the Northern Territory mining minister, will you be speaking in support of such a resolution at the next party conference?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. I believe it is a common secret that the Labor Party intends to debate the uranium question at the next national conference. For a political party - any political party - it is correct to debate a policy. Policies that stay in place for 50 years can become archaic and unworkable. We now see a debate within the Liberal Party about migration, and I believe that is very helpful, very democratic.

Ms CARNEY: You also receive memos from Matty Bonson, minister. Will you support ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe a strong and robust debate is very democratic. To be in the Labor Party conference you have to be an elected delegate. No delegates have been elected yet. If I am an elected delegate, I will stand up and speak for or against uranium.

Ms CARNEY: Will you support, or advocate support for getting rid of the no new mines policy, and will you support increased uranium mining in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: Leader of the Opposition, that question is nowhere in my outputs, and I do not believe you should be asking it.

Ms CARNEY: Well, it is, with respect. Let us go to the budget papers. Budget Paper No 3 – here it is - Minerals and Energy. This is all about mining exploration. How on earth can you say that my earlier question had nothing to do with this output area? I cannot take that seriously, can I?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your question, please?

Ms CARNEY: That was the question, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, personal views and opinions do not come under my ministerial responsibilities. That was a question of my personal views on uranium. It does not matter what my personal views on uranium are, but it is not here. I am happy to talk about exploration. I am happy to talk

about even mining of uranium that is currently happening in the Northern Territory, but my personal views are my personal views, like yours, and I do not believe it is relevant in this debate.

Ms CARNEY: What financial or industry support does your department afford those exploring for uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: My department does not provide direct support to the people, as they do, for example, in South Australia to drill holes and pay for it. My department provides a \$15.2m package called Building the Territory's Resource Base. My department provides the expertise to work with the industry. My department provides software, where people from all over the world can actually access a professional web page to find out about minerals, mineral exploration and titles. My department provides geophysical data and deep seismic survey results that are provided free of charge to the potential explorers. As I said, we are the only jurisdiction in Australia that have gone to that extent. Others are just starting to follow now, because they have seen the success of what we are doing.

On the other hand, the department has people who advise the industry on geology, help the industry with titles, help the industry to access mineral sites or mines on indigenous land, and who advise, free of charge, the industry on occupational health and environmental issues. This is something that others do not provide. The reality is that, currently, the big exploration companies do not undertake explorations; the small explorers are exploring. The small explorers cannot afford to pay for the information and the data, and that is why we provide it for free. I believe \$15.2m over four years is a significant input to the industry, because this money is allocated specifically for the assistance of the industry.

Ms CARNEY: There are also other things you, as mining minister, can do to support a company that makes application for an exploration for uranium mining. Can you tell me if you would do the following: provide industry support, assistance in relation to understanding skills needs, assisting in land access, and infrastructure project approvals? You, as a Northern Territory minister, certainly have a role to play, do you not?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, and we attend to that. We understand there is a lack of skill at the moment, not only in the Territory, but Australia-wide. We have instigated a geology scholarship. We provide young Territorians with \$12 000 a year for three years to study geology, and with work experience in the department or with companies. We provide funding to the Minerals Council for functions or grants. We facilitate access to land. The IBIS is an indigenous group which helps people to access land. They go out and explain about mining to indigenous people. Certainly, we accelerate the process of titles, to ensure there is no backlog, and even provide grants to institutes which work very closely with the mining industry. For example, we provided a \$35 000 grant this year to the welding industry, and we will continue to do so.

Ms CARNEY: You can actively assist approvals for the exploration of uranium, can you not?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department has no role to play in approving or disapproving applications for uranium mining. This is absolutely, clearly, a decision for the Commonwealth minister. The department is the messenger which provides information to the federal minister. The federal minister makes the decision and, under the *Mining Act*, I am obliged to follow the decision. Really, our role in that case is conveying the message and bringing back the answer. As I have said to you before, we are very happy to work with all applicants, with people who provide information to the proper authorities, but we are happy to regulate any mine, including a uranium mine, in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: I was not actually talking about the department, I was talking about you. You, as the Northern Territory Mines minister, have a role to play. You can, given your very good relationship with the ...

Mr KNIGHT: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman! What output is this actually referring to and what line item is it referring to?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you want to accept that question?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe the Leader of the Opposition has not finished yet.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Given your excellent relationship with the federal minister, you, as Northern Territory minister have a role to play. Let us be up front. You can go into bat for a mining company, or you cannot go into bat for them. In relation to uranium mining, would you go into bat for companies wishing to explore for uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: For commercial exploration of uranium in the Northern Territory, companies do not have to ask my or anybody's permission to explore for uranium ...

Ms CARNEY: No, it is not about your permission.

Mr VATSKALIS: The companies put an application in to the department; the department approves the application without even me knowing who applies for what. There is no role for me to play in applications for uranium exploration.

With regards to the approval for uranium mines, my role is confined and specified clearly under the *Mining Act*. I tend to follow the *Mining Act*, otherwise I would be personally liable for not doing my duty. On the other hand, I do not believe the federal minister will ask my personal opinion ...

Ms CARNEY: But you are so close.

Mr VATSKALIS: To date, he has not asked for a personal opinion on uranium for the simple reason there has not been any application for a uranium mine in the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: Are you saying the federal minister has not asked for your view - not your personal view - on uranium?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, he has not.

Ms CARNEY: When you two merrily waltzed out of the front of Parliament House a year or so ago, and the media report was about uranium, what did you discuss?

Mr VATSKALIS: He came and told me that he is taking control of the uranium in the Northern Territory. I asked him why he was taking control of the uranium.

Ms CARNEY: You smiled at him lovingly and said: 'Okay ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, the minister is answering your question.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, I enjoyed it because, obviously, the federal minister was not aware of his rights. I asked: 'Why are you taking control of the uranium in the Territory when you already have it?'

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. I do not know whether it was recorded, but nice try. I know the member for Nelson wants to ask you some questions about uranium and my colleague, Mrs Miller, will want to do so as well.

I would like to move to McArthur River and what is being generally described as the debacle in relation to its application, or its request for assistance from your government. What was the cost of employing the scientist, the consultant, Wayne Erskine, who wrote the report into the proposed McArthur River rechanneling? There are a number of questions, so I will ask just that one. What was the cost of employing the scientist?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, I suggest the Leader of the Opposition keeps that question for my colleague, the minister who is responsible for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage, because Erskine was not employed by the Department of Mines and Energy.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. In your department, has there been any ongoing costs or associated costs involving that consultant?

Mr VATSKALIS: Again, I will leave that one for NRETA, because my department is not involved in the environmental assessment of the McArthur River Mine expansion.

Ms CARNEY: I know you would have done, thank you. Are you aware of the extra costs to the company by reason of it having to redo much of the environmental planning for the proposed expansion? Is there any compensation to the company from government in line with the debacle to date?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, when mining companies put applications for expansions or opening mines anywhere in the world, anywhere in Australia, they have to undergo a certain process. Some mining companies get approval, some do not, and then they have to go back. This is not new for

Australia, the Northern Territory, or the world. This is part of the normal application process. Many companies have to go back and completely redraft their application because they have not satisfied the environmental criteria as specified by the legislation. That is part of the process. I am not aware of any company, anywhere in the world, that has claimed or has received compensation because they had to do their job to satisfy the legislative requirements of the jurisdiction.

Ms CARNEY: Can you outline, for the purposes of *Hansard*, the current position for the company at McArthur River?

Mr VATSKALIS: I suggest you ask that one question to my colleague, the minister responsible for NRETA, because my understanding is the company is currently undergoing – or prepared to undergo - an environmental process which is not part of my portfolio.

Ms CARNEY: I have asked you, as mining minister, to put on the *Parliamentary Record* what the current situation is with respect to the McArthur River Mine and its application. Indeed, if memory serves me correctly, I believe it was you who issued the media release, or certainly made a public comment about what was described as the 11th hour solution. You do have a role to play and I ask that you answer that question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. Leader of the Opposition, the process for a company to open or to expand a mine is twofold. First, they have to go through an environmental process. The EPA or NRETA would provide advice to the minister for Mines, and the minister for Mines then has to, under the *Mining Act*, consider advice before he gives the okay for the mine to go through. Currently, my understanding is that McArthur is prepared to undergo, or is undergoing, the environmental process. My role will start when the advice from the minister is received by me. I do not have a role to play yet.

In regard to the previous situation, I received that advice from the minister, my colleague, Marion Scrymgour, the member for Arafura. I considered that advice. I was unable to make a decision, under the circumstances, to approve or disapprove the expansion of the mine, and I asked the mine to go back to section 4(a) of the *Environmental Assessment Act* and resubmit an application. That is exactly what they have been doing.

Ms CARNEY: Budget Paper No 3, page 224, in relation to this output, under the heading Minerals and Energy, says it is the: 'Provision of strategic services to support the acceleration of exploration ...' etcetera. Are you saying that you had no role in this matter to date, and that McArthur River's application for the rechannelling of the river was all a long way away from you?

Mr VATSKALIS: I explained to you that my role, under the *Mining Act*, is clearly specified. I receive advice from the minister for the Environment. I consider that advice, because I am required, under the *Mining Act* which I operate under, to consider the environmental impact, occupational health and safety and mining practices. I did that, and I was not satisfied that the company had adequately addressed ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, could you repeat that - that you were not satisfied?

Mr VATSKALIS: I was not satisfied that the company had adequately addressed the nine issues identified by the Environment Protection Agency. I asked them to come back to look at my input again and put an application through NRETA addressing the criteria before I could make an informed decision.

Ms CARNEY: Let me see if I have got this right. In relation to its initial application for the rechannelling of the river, you, as minister, formed the view that the company did not address issues in the EPA ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Adequately.

Ms CARNEY: You would presumably be aware that there are significant questions in relation to the EPA's role; they are outlined in Mr Erskine's report. Does that not trouble you, as minister; that you formed a view based on what is widely considered to be flawed information?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, we now have an aggrieved party who says I have questions about the process or anything else. That is fine, I can accept that. I have to rely upon scientific reports and

information put before me. I cannot rely on what people out there say. I will not be pressured by the tension out there. We have seen the debacle of Mt Todd, which is a clear indication of - and it was before your time, Leader of the Opposition, and I do not put any blame on you. However, people actually gave their approval of that mine and, at that time, they did a disservice to the Northern Territory. They put financial considerations before environmental considerations. I am not prepared to do that. There were questions about the process - fine. Let people ask questions of the right people. I am not the right person. I have a role to play under the *Mining Management Act* and the *Mining Act*, and that is what I do.

Ms CARNEY: Did you talk to the minister for the Environment before she publicly announced her decision?

Mr VATSKALIS: The decision was provided to me. I spoke to her about the decision and about the issues, because we are colleagues, we are in the same Cabinet and we talk to each other.

Ms CARNEY: So you did talk to her about it before the announcement, before the decision was made public?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, because the process is undertaken by the department, not undertaken by the minister. The minister received the advice from the department and, as required by law, they advised me. Until this advice is provided to the minister, why am I going to talk to her about it? I have not received the advice and I do not know what is in the paper.

Ms CARNEY: You said that the minister received advice from the department. I thought the public spin was that the minister received advice from the independent EPA?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what they received. The EPA is independent, the minister has no role to play. I consider that independence. I do not direct my CEO how to do his business, he is independent.

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but we are talking about what happened between you and the minister for the Environment and the information upon which she relied which, in turn, you did - which you are now saying is information from her department. I thought the public spin was the independent EPA?

Mr VATSKALIS: I consider the department to be independent because we, under no circumstances, will direct the departments how to do business. Ministers and parliamentarians do policy, they do not run departments. I am not the CEO of the department.

Ms CARNEY: As head of the department, is it not your role to provide policy to your department, the people you represent?

Mr VATSKALIS: Thank you, I agree with you. This is my role, not to run the department but to provide policy to the department.

Ms CARNEY: But you said that the department's job is to provide policy.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no, no, I did not say that. I said the role of the parliamentarian, the minister, is to provide policy, not to run a department.

Ms CARNEY: Right. In any event, you would be aware that the information upon which the Environment minister relied - , which, in turn, you relied upon to the extent that you can claim any involvement - has now been seriously questioned. Have you undertaken any separate analysis from your department in light of the claims that the EPA's initial assessment or advice to minister Scrymgeour was less than adequate?

Mr VATSKALIS: First of all, I question who questioned the advice. Who are the people who questioned the advice? You have people who have come out and said: 'I am a specialist on river geology or geomorphology, and I question the advice'. I will say I accept that. However, on the other hand, Leader of the Opposition, as you are probably aware, my background is in environmental science. When I receive a report, I read it and I can understand it.

When I read the Erskine report, I realised there were issues. When I read the report from EPA that was presented to me, I realised there were a number of issues that needed to be addressed on environmental grounds. People can question the report but, until they came out and present real facts about the report in

question, I cannot accept that. If Joe Bloggs questions a report, that is fine, but if professional Joe Bloggs comes out and gives facts and evidence why the report is wrong, then I will take notice.

Ms CARNEY: Around about how many direct and indirect jobs does McArthur River Mine provide?

Mr VATSKALIS: You should ask McArthur River that one, because I do not regulate how many people are employed.

Ms CARNEY: My question was not about regulation of employees. I ask you to answer that question on the basis that you and your parliamentary colleagues often say in parliament that this project, this mine, whatever, employs directly X amount people, indirectly X amount of people. Surely you, as Mines minister, have some idea of how many people are employed directly and indirectly by this very significant mining company?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, the number of people working or not working in McArthur River - or at any mine - is not something that I consider. However, at the same time, do you imply, Leader of the Opposition, that because a company employs a number of people, directly or indirectly, that they can do whatever they like and leave Territorians to pay the costs of potential disasters in the future? I cannot accept that.

Ms CARNEY: Well, minister, two things. Firstly, this is the bit where I ask the questions and you answer them and, secondly, do not beg the question. I will ask it again. Do you, as mining minister, have any idea how many jobs, direct and indirect, McArthur River provides?

Mr VATSKALIS: And I will answer again, Leader of the Opposition: how many people they directly or indirectly employ is irrelevant when I have to make a decision about the potential expansion of a mine.

Ms CARNEY: Minister, it was not in relation to ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, the minister has answered the question.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, you are being close to obstructive.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, ask the question please.

Ms CARNEY: Please do as your colleague has done and provide me the courtesy of having a dialogue with the minister.

My question was not in relation to your colleague, minister Scrymgour's decision about McArthur River mining. I am not sure whether I can make this more simple for you. The question is this: do you, as Territory mining minister, have any idea how many jobs, direct and indirect, are provided at the McArthur River Mine by that company?

Mr VATSKALIS: And my answer again is, I believe you are implying that I have to consider the number of jobs, directly and indirectly ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman!

Mr VATSKALIS: No, you asked me a question, let me answer it.

Ms CARNEY: My point of order is this: I have asked three times now a very simple question, which the minister, for reasons that escape me, is simply refusing to answer. I ask that, in the same way that you ask other non-government members on this committee to ask questions, you ask the minister to answer the questions, otherwise what on earth are we doing here?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The minister has stated that it is not a question of relevance to him and I believe he has answered the question. I do not know how many times he has to answer that same question. You asked the question. We can spend all day here going back and forth asking these questions. There is no point of order.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, the minister has said repeatedly, 'if I am implying', etcetera. There is no implication; it is just a straightforward question. I will ask, for a fourth time, whether the Territory's mining minister has any idea how many jobs are provided at McArthur River?

Mr VATSKALIS: To satisfy your curiosity, Leader of the Opposition - I do not know where you are going to go with these questions - 250 people directly and 500 indirectly.

Ms CARNEY: There you go. Thanks, minister, that was not hard, was it? Are you going to be as difficult with other questions, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: It depends how difficult you can be.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Ask the questions through the Chair.

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Chairman, I do not know how much more basic a question can be. I do not know - well, perhaps I do understand why you are so prickly about it, given the dissent in Labor ranks in relation to a number of issues ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, please ask your question. That is of no relevance. That has no relevance!

Ms CARNEY: ... and I note the squirming of the minister for Mines. Let us talk about the Chief Minister, minister. You would appreciate that, at McArthur River, a number of indigenous Territorians are employed - yes?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, I believe so.

Ms CARNEY: Do you think that is good?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe so. That is why I intend, as a part of conditions for opening new mines, to actually ensure that every mining company which comes here is to provide me with an indigenous employment plan.

Ms CARNEY: The Chief Minister supports that, does she?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is true.

Ms CARNEY: Matthew Bonson thinks that is a good idea, does he?

Mr VATSKALIS: I think so too.

Ms CARNEY: That is good.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, next question.

Ms CARNEY: Are you aware of any Commonwealth public servants who have been seconded to your government to assist with the further development of McArthur River Mine?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not in our department.

Ms CARNEY: So it is not in your department. Are you aware of any in any other Northern Territory government departments?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am sorry, I am not aware. This is the first time I heard about it.

Ms CARNEY: First time you heard it, okay. Could you update the committee on the present situation with McArthur River Mine? You met with McArthur River and, whereas their initial proposal involved a rechannelling of the river, it is now going to expand its open cut mine? Is that right?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is they asked for an expansion of the current pit for metallurgical purposes, and they will continue that work while they are doing the proposal for whatever plans they have for the expansion. I am not aware of what they will put in the EPA. I have not seen that because my role is not there; my role starts when the advice from the EPA is received.

Ms CARNEY: In relation to the expansion of the pit, does the company need your approval for that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, they do.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, and obviously you provided your approval?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, because it did not have any impact on the river, or anything else that was in that area that was already disturbed. It was in an area where they did not have to encroach on any of the proposed changes to the river.

Ms CARNEY: Does an expansion of a pit have any environmental implications?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, they went through a EPA, I believe, through ...

Mr CARROLL: No.

Mr VATSKALIS: What was determined by the EPA?

Mr CARROLL: The company put in an application to expand the test pit. Because it was a notice of intent under the legislation, the application was referred to the EPA for its advice. Its advice was that it was okay to go ahead with the expansion and that was what was approved. It was done on advice from the EPA.

Ms CARNEY: Like the initial recommendations of the EPA, this subsequent advice in relation to the expansion of the pit found its way on your desk?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Ms CARNEY: That is the process?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. When there are so many questions relating to the EPA's initial assessment – let us call it McArthur River phase 1 - did you have any questions regarding the subsequent assessment in relation to – let us call it McArthur River phase 2?

Mr VATSKALIS: The EPA provided us with advice that it does not need any environmental assessment, however ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry. Could you repeat that?

Mr VATSKALIS: The expansion of the pit did not require any formal environmental assessment by the EPA.

Ms CARNEY: Did not require any formal? Right.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, no LPR or EIS. This was provided to me, and I then considered the issue as required by the act. I found out, because of the location of the pit and the way it was constructed, it did not have any environmental issues on the area. The mining practices employed by Xstrata were acceptable to us and we ticked it off.

Ms CARNEY: Perhaps I will finish there.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is all right. You can come back. Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, I know that. Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain first, if you like?

Mr MILLS: No, I am fine for now, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman, I am not going to harp too much on the uranium issue; however, minister, you say you do not have a role to play if a new uranium mine was to open in the Northern Territory. What would happen – and I put it in this context: presently your government opposes a radioactive waste facility which the Commonwealth has the power to put in the Northern Territory, and your

government has protested. Therefore, if the government gave approval for another uranium mine, which goes against the Labor Party policy of no more mines, are you just going to sit there and say nothing?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, that is a slightly hypothetical question. Do you wish to take it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Ms CARNEY: The minister is a big boy, Mr Deputy Chairman, I am sure he can work it out.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, the reality is there was an agreement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory government in 1999; I believe it was re-signed in 2002. Under this agreement, they incorporated amendments to the *Mining Management Act* that the minister of the Territory is obliged to follow the advice of the federal minister. It does not matter what preservation policies the present government has in place, or what the government believes about uranium or not. By law, I have - to approve or not approve a uranium mine - ask for further advice of the federal minister.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. I am just trying to clarify the Northern Territory government's position if a second mine was approved by the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has the power to put a nuclear waste facility in the Northern Territory; you government does not agree with it. In my case, I do not think it is anywhere near as bad as you are making it out to be. However, you also oppose any more uranium mines. If the federal government is going to approve a new uranium mine, is your government just going to be quiet and not say anything, or is it going to oppose that mine?

Mr VATSKALIS: We expressed our position, which is the national Labor Party's position. The reality in the Territory is it does not matter what we believe or we think, if Macfarlane ticks off a uranium mine, unfortunately, I have to sign it off. It is a requirement by law that I do so.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, minister, but we are not run, hopefully, by the Australian Labor Party federal branch; we are run by the Northern Territory government. It may be an ALP Northern Territory government, but it is the Northern Territory government. Will the Northern Territory government, if it came to make a comment on an approval for a second mine in the Northern Territory, support it - not legally, I am looking at Northern Territory government policy? Would they support it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Irrespective of whether we support it or not, the political reality is I have to approve or not approve it after I received advice from the federal minister. However, we have said before that we do not like that very much, but we have to live it. We still believe that we should be the regulators of any new mine we have in the Northern Territory, because we can do it to protect the health, welfare and environment of the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: I am confused because, when it comes to matters like foreign fishing boats around the Northern Territory, you make lots of comments to the Commonwealth to do something about it but, in a lot of cases, it is not part of the area that our Northern Territory governance covers. However, you still make issue about it. You make issue about the radioactive waste facility although, when it comes to a second uranium mine, you are just going to give me a legal answer but not a policy answer.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I make a lot of noise about illegal fishing for various reasons. One of them is because, clearly, in Commonwealth waters, it is clearly a Commonwealth responsibility. These people breach Commonwealth legislation - quarantine, migration, you name it. Not only that, due to the inaction of the Commonwealth we have the potential of a disaster in the Northern Territory with the introduction of disease. There is the potential to destroy our cattle industry. That is the first point.

We oppose the nuclear dump because that was not a decision based on science, that was a decision based on politics - and you know that very well. Irrespective if you believe ...

Mr WOOD: You tell Mr Rann in South Australia.

Mr VATSKALIS: Irrespective if you believe we should have one or not - and we probably do need one, but we need one in a place that is safe, that is scientifically assessed and evaluated. As for Mr Rann, the reality is the Commonwealth was not able to build the nuclear dump in Woomera, for no other reason than they stuffed up the process. The South Australian government took them to court, not on the legality of the dump, but on the way that they went about compulsorily acquiring the land as a matter of urgency. The court ruled there was no urgency; they were going to build something that will take seven years. That was

what they wanted. They did not want to have any legal wrangling with any states; so: 'Where will we put it? In the Territory' because the Territory cannot object to it'.

I said to them: 'Yes, there are more territories, there are three actually. There is the Antarctic Territory, there is the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. The ACT is a good place, and it is close to Sydney. Why do you not put it there?' But they can sacrifice the people of the Northern Territory to each capital; they have more friends there.

Mr WOOD: I am an Australian actually, and some issues we deal with - as the Chief Minister discussed the other day about Aboriginal issues - are national issues. Unfortunately, when it comes to this issue, we do not deal with it as an Australian issue. South Australia is now going to build its own nuclear waste facility at Olympic Dam. All right, we will move on from there because you are not going to convince me that there is a lot of science there.

In regard to Mt Todd, could you tell us how much money the Northern Territory government has spent on the rehabilitation of Mt Todd up to this date?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have approved \$5m for the rehabilitation of Mt Todd. A significant amount of that has already been spent to reconfigure pipes and pumps in order to address the issues that were left behind. Out of this \$5m, I believe there is a small amount outstanding for some technical repairs. I believe about \$4.2m has already been spent, with \$800 000 remaining. On top of that, it is about \$375 000 a year to circulate water around from pits and holding ponds in order to prevent any escape of contaminated water to Edith River.

Mr WOOD: You are saying there is an ongoing cost, is there?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Of \$375 000?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$375 000. However, because of the agreement with Vista Gold, that cost will be picked up by Vista Gold Corporation, which has acquired the mining leases for Mt Todd.

Mr WOOD: That is a reference to \$190 000 that Vista Gold will have to spend in the first half of 2006-07 - is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Are they going to be spending \$190 000 per year?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, they will pick up the whole \$375 000 a year, every year.

Mr WOOD: For how long?

Mr VATSKALIS: For five years.

Mr WOOD: For five years.

Mr VATSKALIS: After that, should they decide to actually proceed with mining, they will acquire all the liability of the mine.

Mr WOOD: What I am a little unsure of, minister, is, in your statement - I believe it was a ministerial report - on 30 March this year, you said that, basically, the CLP had left a legacy of a \$30m bill to Territorians to clean up Mt Todd. Just from your figures, \$5m plus even five times \$375 000 - which would be probably about \$1.7m - is \$6.7m. Where has the figure \$30m come from?

Mr VATSKALIS: \$5m was to address the burning issues of retention ponds. The heap leach moat was actually destroyed and water was coming through the heap leach and finding its way down to the river. \$375 000 is only maintenance of equipment that will circulate the water from ponds to ponds. This is only for maintenance. The final cost of rehabilitating the Mt Todd mine site will be \$30m.

Mr WOOD: Right. The government actually will not have to foot that bill?

Mr VATSKALIS: Should Vista Gold decide to commence operations and extract gold at Mt Todd, the agreement says that they will take over all liability for the past and future disturbances, and rehabilitation of the Mt Todd mine site.

Mr WOOD: You said that 'should' Vista Gold take over. Under Key Variations on page 223, it says they 'will' take over the management of the site from January 2007. Is it a 'should' or a 'will'?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a 'will'.

Mr WOOD: It is a 'will'?

Mr VATSKALIS: The agreement will be signed and they will.

Mr WOOD: Have you any details you can give us on what kind of production you expect from Vista Gold? Are they basically going to ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I am just asking about the ...

Mr CARROLL: Can I clarify the arrangements with Vista Gold? Vista Gold agreed to take over, from 1 January 2006, the ongoing maintenance, and there is a signed agreement which the minister tabled in the parliament when he made that statement. It is from 2006 for ongoing maintenance, and it is in the event of them starting mining that they take over full rehabilitation responsibility.

Mr SELLERS: Mr Wood, if you just bear with me, there is one other addition. In the money that has been spent for this year, there is \$370 000-odd that has been budgeted. However, with the agreement of Vista Gold, we actually have to hand over the plant and equipment in an operational manner. With the extensive rain that has occurred over this Wet Season, the actual expenditure at the site was a further \$168 000 to date. That was to repair and maintain extra diesel and other aspects of keeping the site operational, ready to hand over to Vista Gold at the end of this calendar year.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I know you are not Vista Gold, but would you be able to at least give us some idea of what Vista Gold intend to do? Do they intend to bring the mine back into full production, or are they looking, as you mentioned to me before, the possibility of opening up new sites within that lease area?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding, member for Nelson, is that the area is highly prospective for gold, not only the actual Mt Todd site as it is today, but around it. Vista Gold is a company that acquires mines like that, and proceeds either to operate it or then to develop them and sell them to producers. That is a decision for the company to make. However, this agreement we have signed is comprehensive and details every step of what is going to happen and how it is going to happen.

Mr WOOD: What arrangements have been made for indigenous employment with this mine?

Mr VATSKALIS: Vista Gold has an agreement with the Jawoyn Corporation with regards to Mt Todd and indigenous employment.

Mr WOOD: Are they taking over the entire area that was run by the previous owners?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that the receiver for the previous company that was running Mt Todd sold all the mining leases they had under their possession to Vista Gold.

Mr WOOD: The reason I ask that, minister, is because there was some talk of the possibility of some tourism on the site when I was last there. It planned to become a ...

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding was the same, member for Nelson. The Jawoyn Corporation had plans and ideas about a Lake Todd. However, I do not know what stage they are at, at the moment.

Mr WOOD: My favourite area, minister, even though you belt me over the head sometimes with my uranium opinions - but geothermal.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mr WOOD: Part of the mix of good energy sources for Australia, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you.

Mr WOOD: What is the latest on changes to our legislation that would encourage geothermal exploration?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, I am a strong supporter of geothermal energy. I was very impressed recently with Mr Patrick Moore, the co-founder of Greenpeace, speaking at their annual conference in Perth advocating other forms of energy apart from coal. Geothermal was one that he spoke about, as it is very economic and efficient. He gave an example that, should you put solar panels in your house, it would cost \$10 000 and the return would be \$100 profit in electricity generation a year. However, if you use geothermal, the return would be \$1300.

We established a task force in 2005 to look at geothermal energy and hot rocks in the Northern Territory. A Cabinet submission was prepared to process and approve the preparation of legislation. For a project plan preparation, dedicated staff members were allocated to the project. We outlined the legislation we have prepared; we identified key issues and principles and we examined them. We presented it at a geothermal conference, and we are now doing desktop geological work. We are progressing to establish legislation for exploration and exploitation of geothermal energy in the Northern Territory. It is my understanding that hot rocks are found in the Centre of the Territory, and McArthur and Dunmarra basins, and they can be utilised.

Mr WOOD: There has been some preliminary work done, I believe, by someone from ANU, that there could possibly be sites from Arnhem through to Timber Creek, taking in the Mataranka area. Has that been looked at, at all?

Mr VATSKALIS: Last year, we provided you with a map that highlights the location, and the areas you actually mentioned are highlighted on this map. However, the information we have is very limited. Most of the information comes from deep drill holes that were done onshore for petroleum exploration. The department will continue to collect data information to identify more accurately where the hot rocks are.

Mr WOOD: How many people are on geothermal task force and who are they?

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister? It is a departmental one headed by Mr Ross Trevena, and it has people from all relevant areas of the department to ensure that we pick up the regulatory and development issues we need to, to ensure that the Territory has a world-class regulatory regime to enable that resource to be explored effectively, and to the best advantage of all Territorians, both from safety and environmental issues, as well as for the benefit of the companies exploring the resources.

Mr WOOD: When do you expect the legislation to come to parliament?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe the middle of next year.

Mr CARROLL: Might be earlier than that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Maybe earlier, but by the middle of next year we will be debating it in parliament.

Mr WOOD: You mentioned the geothermal conference.

Mr VATSKALIS: We presented a paper at the geothermal conference, that is right. The department did.

Mr WOOD: When was that geothermal conference?

Mr SELLERS: It was around the beginning of the year, February or March, We presented on the geothermal potential and the intent to move on a legislative basis for the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Would it be possible to get a copy of the papers presented, please?

Mr SELLERS: Most certainly, we can organise that.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I know you mentioned that somebody from Greenpeace had made a statement on it. Have you been in touch with companies like Geodynamics? They are a company that is very supportive, because they are in the business. There are also some major cost factors. One of those factors is actually

drilling 4 km into the ground and hitting the right rock. Even though Greenpeace says it is a return of so much - \$1300 or whatever it was - we would have to realise that it is a fairly difficult energy source to tap and there are some major hurdles for us to overcome.

Mr VATSKALIS: If I could just correct, it was Patrick Moore, the co-founder of Greenpeace, who presented a paper at AMEC. One of the problems with hot rocks is that they are not located near residential areas where you need the power. They might experience difficulties in finding the rocks, establishing a geothermal factory, and producing power. In the Territory, there would certainly be distances. I recall that last year you provided me with information about the company, which information I passed to the department, to incorporate in the portfolio with regard to geothermal energy.

Mr WOOD: I hope I can put this question to you under Resource Industry Development. Do you have much to do with the Clean Fuel company that is proposing to come to Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not at this stage. However, I met the people at the recent SEAAOC meeting, but they have not done a formal presentation to us. They are currently dealing with DBERD and the Chief Minister's Department, rather than us.

Mr WOOD: The reason I raise it - I do not know where your boundary changes between minister Henderson's area and your area - is they are going to look at the use of condensate. One of the by-products of that condensate will be hydrogen. I am interested to know whether your department would have any input into the possible use of hydrogen as a by-product in the Northern Territory. The area I have been promoting is whether we could possibly use it as a source of energy for public transport. I do not know whether it would, under this heading here, come into your area.

Mr VATSKALIS: Strictly speaking, it is not a mining issue. They are already receiving something, but coming out as a by-product of a gas, so it is more of industry development. With regards to the use of hydrogen or any other fuel for public transport, that would probably be something to be considered by the minister for Transport. We do support the efficient use of fuel, especially fuel like that, that is clean and efficient as hydrogen is.

Mr WOOD: McArthur River Mine, minister. You made some statements about the Erskine report. You said you had read it and you took into consideration what they had said. Is it a concern that the Erskine report came out after even the supplementary EIS was printed, and that the company had no chance to actually look at the Erskine report? I am saying that because you have made a judgment that the Erskine report had a number of issues, and it certainly did. Do you think there is a problem that you made a judgment using the Erskine report when the company at least did not have a chance to respond to that report?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, this question should be directed to my colleague, the minister responsible for the Environment, because that was part of the process. However, I asked to meet with Professor Erskine, and I met with him. I went through the report with him. He explained to me the issues that he found with McArthur River Mine, which I attend to agree with. However, when I asked him if the river can be diverted without any problem, he told me that it can be done with proper design and parameters. My decision with regards to McArthur was influenced by Professor Erskine's response. That is why I was unable to make a conclusive decision to either give the approval or not to the mine. That is why I asked the mine to go back to the drawing board and to do the same thing under a new environmental assessment process.

Mr WOOD: I do not disagree with what you are saying there. However, would it not have been possible to at least shorten the process if the company had a chance to respond to that report, which was the report that actually stopped this mine going ahead. Then, at least your department and NRETA could have made a valued judgment on the response of the mine to that report?

Mr VATSKALIS: If you believe that there was a problem with the environmental process, once again, I say it is not my responsibility. I am the Mines minister not the Environment minister. I have to act within the power of the *Mining Act* or the *Mining Management Act*, which is clearly defined, and that is what I did. Before that stage, it is the jurisdiction of the minister for the Environment. I believe she is after me so you will have the opportunity to ask her this question.

Mr WOOD: That is true, but you made a decision based on Mr Erskine's report. All I am saying is you are part of the process about whether a mine can operate or not. Do you not think there was a substantial

flaw in the process which, in actual fact, meant that this mine - whether it was going to go ahead or not - has now been delayed a lot longer than it should have been?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said to you before, that process was not done under me. I did not have any control of that process. That is why I am saying you should ask the minister for the Environment. I had to rely upon the information provided to me. I probably went even further, asking Professor Erskine to meet and speak with me. I cannot comment on whether the process was done right or wrong. I do not know, it is not my responsibility. You should ask the minister for the Environment.

Mr WOOD: All right, I will not ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Can I just interrupt there? We have a point of order about your phone, member for Daly. Can you please turn it off. I ask all other people here, if they have a mobile phone, please turn them off.

Mr WOOD: I do not have any more questions on that section, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Ms CARNEY: My colleague, the member for Katherine, would like to ask a question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Certainly.

Mrs MILLER: Last year, you started doing the road shows interstate. Have you completed those?

Mr VATSKALIS: The first stage of the road shows should be completed, with every Australian state visited. We have even gone to Denver, Toronto and London to promote the Territory. I am very pleased to say that the results were outstanding. We have presented papers in AMEC - the Australian Minerals Exploration Conference - in Perth. When we attended the conference in Toronto; we had access to nearly 15 000 people overall who visited our stall there as part of the Australian exhibit, where they received information. The same thing happened in London, where we were presented the Territory potential. I am very pleased to say, not only was I there with my department, we had a number of people who have interests in the Northern Territory, from places like Bootu Creek, Matilda Minerals, Arafura Resources, who came at their own expense to promote the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: What direct outcomes did you have from the road show?

Mr VATSKALIS: We had a 250% increase on the uptake on geological information from the department. We have had a significant increase in exploration expenditure in the Northern Territory; for example, in the 2004 last quarter we had \$9m, in the last quarter of 2005, we had \$29m of exploration expenditure on the ground. We have had a significant number of applications for exploration licences in the Northern Territory. As a result, we see people like Browns Oxide, Arafura Resources and Matilda Minerals here in the Northern Territory about to open new mines - the first time since 1997.

Mrs MILLER: You were saying that a lot of these companies invested their own dollars to go to that road show. How much did it cost the department to take the road shows? All of them.

Mr VATSKALIS: The total operational cost of the road shows since March 2005 was approximately \$120 000 - \$70 000 for 2005-06 within Australia and \$50 000 for three cities in America, Canada and London.

Mrs MILLER: Do you plan on doing them again?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are currently planning a second stage of road shows. At this stage, we are actually still presenting to the general - not public - people in the gold mining industry. We will target executives, the people who make the decisions, and make presentations to them and again provide information about the potential of the Territory.

To show how interested people were with the road show, in Perth I was approached by Gina Rinehart, Hancock's daughter. She said she did not know much about the Northern Territory. She was very impressed with the potential of the Territory. If she was not involved in the new venture with Rio Tinto in the Pilbara, she would be coming to the Northern Territory to see the potential for investment. I took the opportunity to provide her with information about iron ore in the Territory, and also invited her to Darwin if she wants to come and have a look around the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Will you reissue the invitation to her?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, and also the president of Oceania, an enormous company that deals with copper. I provided him with information about the copper potential of the Territory. I also invited him to come to the Territory. I have asked the department to write to both of them now, making the invitation to come to the Northern Territory official.

Mrs MILLER: All in all, they have been a success?

Mr VATSKALIS: An outstanding success. That comes not only from us but also from people who attended. A lot of people have lost focus on the Territory; did not know about the Territory. They thought that everything in the Territory was too far away, too difficult. When they realised where the Territory is - and my opening line is: Darwin is the centre of the universe, and they all laughed. I went on to explain that it is four-and-a-half-hours from Sydney by plane, and only three-and-a-quarter hours from Singapore and Brunei. I also presented a map that shows that China is actually on top of us. All of a sudden, their eyes lit up like Christmas tree lights, because they realised where we actually are, and the potential to export to half a billion people to our north, not 25 million people to our south.

Mrs MILLER: Did you say that you had visited China?

Mr VATSKALIS: We plan to go to China in November, to the big mining conference in Peking.

Mrs MILLER: For the sake of the record and so that we will be able to judge over the continuing for ongoing years, are you able to give us a breakdown of the amount of interest that was shown at each of those road shows, so that we are able to assess ...

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the numbers with me, but we can provide the information for you.

Mrs MILLER: Just for future reference so that we will be able to gauge whether the interest is still there or whether it is increasing.

Mr VATSKALIS: When we do the road show, we do not just do the road show and leave it there. We have developed a system now where, every four to six weeks, we provide all the people who participated in the road show - because they leave their name, address and e-mail - a topic alert. We provide them with information about new developments in the Territory, about who found what in the Territory and where, the potential for joint ventures in the Territory, and about new developments in the Territory. The response to that has been very positive.

One indication is the number of hits on the web page we have for the department. Every time we went to a town to provide the information about the Top End, the number of hits on the web page went through the roof. So people became aware of the Northern Territory, and they are actively seeking information on the Territory.

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

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am happy to provide the information. I do not know if you want it on notice, or you want the information. We are happy to provide it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that, or would you prefer it just as an answer?

Mrs MILLER: I am pretty sure that I will get that information.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay.

Ms CARNEY: By Christmas?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, before Christmas.

A witness: By the end of next week.

Mrs MILLER: No, these people will obtain it by then. In that area, that is all that I wish to ask.

Ms CARNEY: What happens at a road show, minister? Tell me about it? What do you do?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have a number of people, people from the department and I, and from supporting industry. We start with an overall presentation of the Northern Territory, the current situation in the Territory, and then we proceed to advise people about the geological aspects and potential of the Territory ...

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, can you just slow down a bit?

Mr VATSKALIS: ... the geological potential and information on the Northern Territory. Richard Brescianini, who is the head of the Geological Survey, presented what we can offer to the industry. He also presents an overall picture of exploration and mining development in the Northern Territory. Then, we have a person who heads the Titles Department who provides information to the people about the processes you have to undergo in the Territory to obtain a mineral exploration licence and mining approval; how to access indigenous land; what steps you have to undertake; and how quickly it can be done. Then, we have other people within the department providing other relevant information.

We have members of the industry themselves who present their story; how they develop mines in the Territory. For example, Trevor Tennant from Bootu Creek came up and gave a presentation to the people about from zero to where they are today and how quickly that was done. Overall, it is a presentation about the Territory as a destination for exploration and mining.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, the presentation is partly written, partly oral?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department prepares it. It is actually oral with a PowerPoint presentation on videos.

Ms CARNEY: Do you, as people have these days, have a copy of that PowerPoint presentation?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe so, I can provide you one.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, please. To ensure that there is no delay - and you will appreciate my scepticism; I have asked for things in the past, not so much with you, minister, but with some of your colleagues. I think the record is about nine months. I actually would really like it sooner than that.

Mr VATSKALIS: I give you my commitment you will receive it before the end of the week.

Ms CARNEY: That would be lovely, thank you.

Mr CARROLL: If we may, we will provide you with the PowerPoints and the printed material that goes with it, because there is a package of material called Top End Secret that all goes together as part of the package.

Ms CARNEY: Right. You are a man of your word, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can organise to get you one before the end of the week. I have a spare one in my office I can give you.

The other thing we have in the material we provide, is a list of the mines currently operating in the Territory. We also have a list of the mines that are to be developed in the Territory, with the name and address of the companies. Therefore, if people want to look for a joint venture, immediately they can pick up the folder and it has all the details there; they can approach the companies. It also has a CD with information maps and everything else. We also take material with us we already produce. A lot of the information we have about petroleum and minerals is already on CD, so you can take it and download them into your computer.

Ms CARNEY: Last year, you said that the aim of the road show was to promote exploration in the Northern Territory. I assume, in the course of these road shows and presentations, that there is a two-way dialogue, isn't there, between, if you, as minister, and others are there and, if you are not there, departmental people and others? Is that correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, it is.

Mr SELLERS: Through you, Mr Deputy Chairman, just another aspect of the road shows is that we would normally have a booth which is manned by the people who go to the road show. That is where a lot of interaction takes place.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you. I wondered whether that takes place.

My question, and the one I have been wanting to get to for the last three or so questions, is: what happens when someone wants to talk about uranium exploration? Do you or your departmental officers say: 'No, I cannot talk about that. That is a federal government responsibility'?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. We provide the clear picture of what the current situation is in the Northern Territory, and we have done it every time, because people have asked about uranium. A lot of people say, 'Do you have the same problem we have in Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales?' We explain to them; we take them step-by-step through the current, proper commercial process in the Northern Territory. We give a clear picture. We do not say: 'This is happening or this is not happening, or this is what we believe'. People do not ask what I believe; people ask: 'What is the situation with uranium in the Territory?'.

Ms CARNEY: Companies that would consider spending or investing millions of dollars would, presumably, ask you, as minister, and your senior departmental people what the future is for uranium mining, and whether this government is supportive of it. You, surely, have been asked that question. What do you say?

Mr VATSKALIS: People actually ask if they can mine for uranium in the Northern Territory? My answer is: under the current legislation, the federal government approves the mining of uranium in the Territory and, given that the federal government has said publicly that they want uranium to be mined, it obvious that the people would be able to mine uranium in the Territory. This is the real story. This is not a political scheme, this is what has happened.

Ms CARNEY: You also, presumably, tell them about the role the Northern Territory government can play?

Mr VATSKALIS: The regulatory role and the role they are playing, yes, of course.

Ms CARNEY: General industry assistance, that sort of thing?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is the same assistance somebody who is looking for iron ore would receive.

Ms CARNEY: If you were going around trying to promote the Northern Territory, you would not say, in relation to every other form of mineral: 'We will help you in every way imaginable', and then not say: 'Except for uranium'? You would say: 'We will help you in every possible way'. Correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have a number of minerals in the Territory, not only uranium, and we provide the same assistance for every miner and explorer in the Territory: It is the same for iron ore, zinc, gold, and uranium.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. That is a tremendous answer, because I now have more information from you in that answer than I have from your government in the last 12 months. I can now form the view - and I believe Territorians can form the view - that you are supportive of further uranium mining in the Northern Territory. I thank you very much for ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Leader of the Opposition, that is your assumption. The ...

Ms CARNEY: ... clarifying that for me. Can I move on to another question?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. Mr Deputy Chairman, she puts words in my mouth. I did not say I support uranium exploration and mining in the Territory or not.

Ms CARNEY: Oh, I am so sorry. I will re-read your answer.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on.

Mr VATSKALIS: What I said is: the department produces material, does gravity surveys, drill holes - all sorts of information that is freely available to everybody in the industry. These maps and this information will provide information for iron ore, zinc, gold, or uranium. You cannot just produce a geological map with gaps. Simple as that.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister, for your clarification of that point.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister. It was not a clarification. It was an attempt, with respect, to weasel out of your previous answer. My next question is in relation to Budget Paper No 3, at page 223 - if I can find Budget Paper No 3. Oh, thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The things I do for you.

Ms CARNEY: That is very good of you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is two you now have.

Ms CARNEY: Sorry, minister. There cannot be too many Budget Papers No 3 floating around. There are a lot of these budget papers floating around. I seem to have them everywhere except my own copies. Budget Paper No 3, page ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Page 223?

Ms CARNEY: Well, it is not, actually. I have been given a bum steer by my own notes. Perhaps we will try 224, minister. In the table under the heading of Performance Measures, there is a reference to client satisfaction. There is a footnote next to that. Footnote 2 says that client satisfaction was not measured in 2005-06. Can you explain why that is?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: Leader of the Opposition, as you are aware, the department was established on 11 July 2005. The undertaking of the client satisfaction survey is an expensive exercise. We might have seen in these estimates hearings in previous years, before we were divorced from DBERD, that it costs about \$50 000 - I do not have a figure precisely in my head but it is a significant figure - to undertake a survey. The department had established itself in the marketplace. Clients did not understand, at the period when we would have done the survey, exactly the nature of the department and the services it provides. Therefore, we took the decision that we would not conduct a survey this year.

We had already taken the functions that are covered by this without taking surveys in the previous year and the year before that. We always intended, when we started the series, that we would do it every year because it did not justify expenditure of taxpayers' money for surveys that were not going to measure significant differences. It was a fairly pragmatic decision that we could do better things with taxpayers' money than a client survey this year. However, we will be doing something in the next year or two, because it is an important indicator of the community's and the clients' understanding of what we do and how satisfied they are with what we do.

Mr VATSKALIS: Client satisfaction is not only showing on the books as a percentage; we see it on the ground. If the Australian Bureau of Statistics publish quarterly results with mineral exploration expenses in the Territory, it will show ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order Mr Deputy Chairman! I asked a pretty specific question, it has been answered. Your colleague, Mr Deputy Chairman, was supportive of these sorts of points of order yesterday. Thank you, minister, we would like to ask some other questions and we really do not want you filling up the slots.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order, minister, if you wish to finish.

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like to finish, Mr Deputy Chairman. If people were not satisfied with the department they would not come to the Territory.

Ms CARNEY: I am not suggesting that they were not. The question has been answered. Give me a break, minister.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I believe the minister would like to continue.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to give you a break. I am happy for the Leader of the Opposition having a break.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you, minister, it is not hard. Site report incidents, page 227 - actually, sorry that is in the next output, isn't it? In that case, minister, you will be delighted to know I have finished with that output.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions? In that case, that concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Primary Industry

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.2, Primary Industry. Are there any questions? Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: I am not the shadow for this, Mr Deputy Chairman. It is the member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Firstly, I would like to take an overarching approach, to commence. How many reviews that are to be publicly reported are in existence in your department? I ask if they could be reported on, tabled I would hope, so that opposition, on behalf of the Territory community, can be very clear about the reviews that are in circulation.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy to provide this. Some of these reviews are publicly reported, some of them are not. Some of them are interdepartmental reviews. The review of DPIFM management service delivery was completed in 2005. The Board of Management Strategic Business Risk Assessment Review 2006 has been completed. The review of ministerial liaison has been completed. The report of the review of technical and sound difficulties across government is currently being finalised. We have the review of DPIFM research functions to assess priorities, which is currently in progress. We review the funding we provide to industry associations currently. That is a rolling review - we review one after the other of the different industry associations. We review the technical DPI resources currently in progress.

The review of the mines and petroleum business areas is an ongoing implementation of recommendations, the review having been completed. We review the Mining Board - again the implementation of the recommendations is under way. The review of mineral studies is completed. The review has been completed and we are currently developing an implementation plan of resource levels applied to mines titles functions. The report of the review of Building the Territory's Resource Base is completed and we are working through the implementation stage.

The pastoral research and development and extended services has been completed. The review of the Veterinary Board at the implementation of the recommendations stage. The report of strategic challenges facing the Northern Territory horticultural industry is completed. For plant and animal emergency response terms of references is currently being developed. The review of research and demonstration farms is currently in progress. Review of the *Fisheries Act*, the industry association, Seafood Council and administration of fisheries grants is currently in progress.

Mr CARROLL: Minister, if I may, there are two others that are not on that list. One is the review of the *Mining Act*, which is currently reaching an end point, and also the review of the Darwin Aquaculture Centre, which has been completed and signed off.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. I request that that document be tabled for our information.

Mr VATSKALIS: No problem.

Mr CARROLL: I need to add on the bottom those two I just mentioned.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I appreciate that. I was not sure if I heard the description of this. I may have; there is a lot there. You have on your desk at the moment, the five-year plan ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Ten-year vision for barramundi?

Mr MILLS: Yes, the barramundi one. What is the title of that again?

Mr VATSKALIS: Five-year plan, 10-year vision for the barramundi fishery.

Mr MILLS: Ten-year vision? Okay. It is on your desk, I understand, at the moment?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is actually back at the department to finalise all the discussions, following the meetings they had with the industry and the commercial fisherman. That will come back to me. It came up to me, I had a look at it, and I sent it back to the department to finalise it and provide recommendations as well.

Mr MILLS: How long has it been at the stage awaiting a formal definitive response?

Mr VATSKALIS: As you would understand, this kind of review is not a very easy process, because we might not be able to get the comments of the amateur fisherman straight away on the table. Some of the commercial fisherman are unable to attend and we need to work with the industry. Also, we have to address a number of complex issues identified; for example, the allocation of resources. First of all, rather than me make a decision, I would like to see a consensus of the industry about who is going to have what. That should be an agreement within the industry, the indigenous interests and the amateurs before it arrives back to me.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate the reasons why it may take some time. It is always difficult to make a decision when we have competing and complex issues to deal with. The question is, principally though, minister, how long has it been at this stage? The community and stakeholders have been consulted, I understand, and recommendations have been arrived at, I presume. Now that the recommendations have been defined, how long has it taken?

Mr VATSKALIS: The last meeting of the committee for discussion was in December 2005.

Mr MILLS: December 2005?

Mr VATSKALIS: Considering the holiday period when nobody is around, and the stakeholders are busy with the Christmas/New Year period, it came to me about March. I studied it, and gave it back to the department to provide me with recommendations. I expect it to be with me in the next few months. It is six months since it came to me. I have to study it, I cannot just form an opinion in two days. It is a complex review, and I have to be able to form a decision.

Mr MILLS: I appreciate that.

Mr VATSKALIS: It is not going to take years, it something that I am very keen to see out very quickly. I expect, in the next few months, it to be back on my desk with firm recommendations.

Mr MILLS: Could you give us a best guess at when we will have a clear position?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, in the next few months. I do not know the priorities for the department at the moment; if this is a burning priority, or there are other more burning priorities. My commitment is that I will bring it before the end of the year, definitely.

Mr MILLS: Before the end of this year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Do you understand that the core issue at stake in this review is the buying back or the reduction of licences?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. If we are actually going to close areas, we have to buy licences. The government has already promised \$1m to buy back barramundi licences. We will consider it, and we will do it the same as we did the year before.

Mr MILLS: Could you remind me, minister, what was your election commitment?

Mr VATSKALIS: It was \$1m to buy three barramundi licences within five years.

Mr MILLS: Three in five years. Do you think that \$1m will achieve that objective?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe that figure is realistic because the last barramundi licence we bought was within that figure.

Mr MILLS: Just so we can understand the operations of government and to play our part in opposition, can you give us an insight into how a licence is valued in today's market terms?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we take it to the Valuer-General who provides us with a starting figure, and that is the start of negotiations with the people. It is not a valuation done by us, it has to be done, and is always done, by the Valuer-General.

Mr MILLS: So I presume that that valuation has been done?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it has not been done.

Mr MILLS: So how did the figure of \$1m come up?

Mr VATSKALIS: By going back to the figures of previous licences we bought.

Mr MILLS: I put it to you that, to go into an election and say three barramundi licences, appeals to the recreational fisherman and \$1m sounds like a big amount. However, is it, in effect, you are unsure whether that is going to be able to deliver in real terms – for legal terms, but not real terms?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, let me remind you, your party went to the election promising 10 barramundi licences; we do not even have 10 barramundi licences. At least, in our case, we have bought barramundi licences before; we know what the cost was. Sorry, we cannot disclose the price because it is a commercial-in-confidence arrangement that people requested. However, the \$1m is within the price range we have had before.

Mr MILLS: It is an interesting point you make about the past, but I have no interest, really, in what has happened before.

Mr VATSKALIS: I just brought this as an example about the costing of the licences.

Mr MILLS: Yes, and a very interesting example too. However, you are currently in this seat, you are the ones that have made the decisions, and it is our role to ensure that you are able to match and meet your obligations.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: A reminder that we will be taking a five minute break at 11 am.

Mr MILLS: Minister, I would like to spend a little time talking about the protection of our waters.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, since you are taking a holistic approach, if you are talking Primary Industry and Fisheries, I would ask the Director of Fisheries to come and sit down; he might be able to assist.

Mr KNIGHT: A point of order, Mr Chairman!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to talk about Fisheries or Primary Industry?

Mr MILLS: My apologies, I thought Fisheries was first.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will come to that in the next output. We will give you a certain amount of time.

Mr MILLS: I will focus for a time on Primary Industry. One that I am interested in has some connection to the previous line of questioning on the philosophical or policy position of the Northern Territory government. As an aside, it appears to be driven largely by an interest in what the larger group think, therefore, you will say something that is inheritably popular for political interests rather than scientific or any other deeper interests.

However, that aside, in a *NT News* report of 16 June 2006: 'No government support for GM cotton'. Putting emotions aside here, you need to analyse this a little further. There was a claim that it is going to demand huge amounts of water and become a pesky weed, some commentator said. We go down further

in the article, where the Primary Industry minister said: 'The Territory government has made it clear, yes, that it does not support commercial cotton growing in the Territory'. That has been made clear; I understand the position. However, to take that one step further, what action have you taken to reinforce that position?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have made our position clear. We have said we will not support developments in cotton in the Territory and everybody knows it. It is our message, loud and clear. Even Monsanto recently announced they are not going to undertake trials in the Territory because they are aware of our government's position.

Mr MILLS: Yes, it is just as if Cyclone Monica is coming, for example, and we make it clear that there is some risk and say that we are concerned and do not prepare, we are just speaking into the wind. Your position is understood. What practical steps have been put in place to actually reinforce and bolster that position?

Mr VATSKALIS: Why do I have to take a position on it? You want me to legislate for cotton, what do we legislate afterwards for - peanuts, for lettuces? Our position on GM cotton is clear: we do not support GM cotton in the Territory. The question about genetically-modified plants is still up there. Some people say one thing, some other people say other things. Of course, the more realistic position is that the Territory owns its water. To grow cotton you require a big water licence. You can control effectively the growth not of GM cotton in the Territory by the water location.

Mr MILLS: Do I understand, therefore, that is your practical means to bolster your position?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, and also our clear position about cotton; that we would not support GM cotton.

Mr MILLS: No, I understand your clear position, similar to uranium mining and nuclear power. I understand the emotional position. Regarding practical issues, however. Let us say company X decides: 'We are going to give it a shot, we are going to come in and plant cotton'. I know your position - you have asserted that. However, what will actually happen if someone does grow cotton?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, for a company to grow cotton in the Territory, they certainly need to have land; they need to clear significant amounts of land to make it cost effective. There is an approval process that is controlled by government. Then he applies for water supply or a water licence; that is another process controlled by government. This is a very effective means of controlling what grows in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: So, if they come in, hypothetically, to test this - we are here to help by the way, so these are probably important questions. Company X comes in and they want to grow soya beans, and they get all the approvals to grow soya beans. Would there be anything to stop a company or an interest coming in and saying: 'We are going to grow soya beans'?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr MILLS: Then they have a change of strategy and decide to try another crop; they already have their approvals. The water that was once used for soya beans is now going to be used for cotton. What can you do about it?

Mr VATSKALIS: The difference would be the volume of water required to grow soya beans and cotton. They would have to ask permission if they are going to increase it. The other thing, of course, is if they try to sell their land to another company, the licence is not automatically transferred. The new company has to apply for a new licence for water.

Mr MILLS: Let us continue down the same path ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, we are talking about hypothetical questions. Which output do the hypothetical questions come under? I cannot understand the hypothetical questions you are asking. Water is not my responsibility. Land care is not my responsibility. With GM cotton, these questions were hypothetical. Where do we stop?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Blain, would you like to rephrase or be a bit more specific?

Mr MILLS: No, not at all. It is a government that takes a whole-of-government approach, the moment you come under attack, you retreat into these tiny little bunkers.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we do not. I was happy to answer the question, but I just want you to make clear to me what output GM cotton falls under.

Mr MILLS: It grows in the ground on farms.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, we do not in the Territory.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, it is getting a bit wobbly here. Can we ask ...

Mr WOOD: It was a fair question, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr MILLS: I know it is hard. It actually is what happens when you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Rephrase the question.

Mr MILLS: Well, a little, just to make it clearer, perhaps sharper. This is the problem you have when you make a position known: when the reasons for that position are put under scrutiny, you find that there are some problems with it. These are the problems when we remove science and reason from it, and appeal to emotion. We end up with some technical problems, as has just been demonstrated.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, with GM cotton, I do not think it is emotional science ...

Mr WOOD: Oh, yes it is.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, you will get your chance.

Mr VATSKALIS: The question is still open here. When the question of GM cotton arose, I did extensive research to find out about GM cotton. You can hear the proponent of GM cotton say it is fantastic; it does not need a lot of water or a lot of pesticides, it is very good.

Well, if it is so good, can you explain to me why companies like Monsanto pulled out of Indonesia when they found out that the genetically-modified cotton performed worse than the local cotton variety? Can you explain to me why they say it is efficient on pesticides and then, when they do the trials, they find on the third year the pesticide level in their planted cotton increased gradually to reach a stage where it would need equal pesticide application for non-GM cotton and GM cotton? I always ...

Mr WOOD: Are you asking a question?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am clarifying ...

Mr WOOD: Sorry.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... the statement made by the member for Blain. I am not going to discuss the issue on emotional grounds; I want solid scientific basis. I am not satisfied yet scientifically that GM cotton is the best solution for the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Well, I know ...

Mr WOOD: New South Wales can be ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One point at a time. Member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Yes, certainly. The position has been made clear, and loudly. However, with respect, minister, we have not had the opportunity for a reasoned and considered debate on this matter.. This is estimates.

Mr VATSKALIS: With all due respect, member for Blain, we had the statement and we ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: That is a hypothetical question, and the minister has reservations about answering a hypothetical question. That is up to him. He answered in the best way he can. Do you want

to clarify and make it more specific? I have asked you, and you still continue with the hypothetical. Minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: The other thing, member for Blain, we have had a very extensive debate on GM cotton. I recall very well the member for Nelson standing up and speaking for minutes about the benefits of GM cotton. I recall very well standing up and speaking for the same amount of time about why I do not agree yet with GM cotton. If somebody comes and gives me scientific proof saying GM cotton is good, I am prepared to sit down and debate it and, if it is true, I will change my opinion ...

Mr WOOD: Try Narrabri research station.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please!

Mr VATSKALIS: However, at this stage, my opinion is GM cotton is not the plant we would like to grow in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Minister, this is not a discussion about the merits or otherwise of GM cotton. You are in government; you have made your position clear. Once that decision is clear, what practical steps are in place to actually reinforce and protect your own position? That is the line of questioning here.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, we have said clearly, we do not want GM cotton in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: Understood.

Mr VATSKALIS: Our position is now this, and the companies out there know it. We said we would finish off the trials, which we did. Companies like Monsanto want to actually try new GM cotton varieties. They have made it clear they are not going to come to the Territory, because they understand the government's position; they do not want to challenge it. I explained to you before, we have a situation with water. We have a situation with land clearing which we can control. The other thing, of course, is we do not have any applications yet from anybody to grow GM cotton.

Mr WOOD: Irrelevant.

Mr MILLS: It is not the point.

Mr VATSKALIS: In addition to that, other jurisdictions are doing studies about growing GM cotton or other varieties, and the answer that came back is that you can grow GM cotton and other varieties, but the profitability of the project, even with GM cotton, would be marginal.

Mr MILLS: Yes. Perhaps to illustrate what I am endeavouring to say, is that your position is clear. However, I am trying to illustrate to you, minister, that if you are trying to keep all those sheep in that paddock, if there is a gap in the fence they will get out. Someone is going to grow cassava in the other paddock, then decide to grow another crop. They have the approval for the land and the water. What are you going to do?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, if we come to that situation, I am pretty sure that we will quickly introduce legislation to ban GM cotton, legally, in the Territory. I do not see the need to do that yet, for the simple reason that nobody has actually applied to grow cotton. We can find out; we can see the difference in demand in land and water, depending on what crops you are going to grow. We can control it effectively like that. If we find out and we have to do something about it, I am pretty sure – and I am telling you - that we will introduce legislation to ban cotton in the Territory.

Mr MILLS: That is a satisfactory answer. It makes sense that if you have the position, and you find that you are effectively hindered in reinforcing and practically supporting that position because someone has found a way, then you would consider legislation.

Mr VATSKALIS: The situation is nobody is knocking on our door to grow cotton because, before they even start growing cotton, they have to go through a process; they will have to acquire land. They have a significant land mass that they have to clear. Okay, we can stop clearing of land. If you cannot acquire sufficient land and water to grow cotton, how are you going to do it?

Mr WOOD: Grow soya beans first.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Wait a minute! You will get your chance.

Mr WOOD: The minister asked a question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, you keep interjecting.

Mr WOOD: I was just answering his question, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr MILLS: All right. Citizen X has land and decides to grow marijuana ...

Mr Wood: That is a good idea.

Mr MILLS: That would give him a good cash crop, make fibre out of it, even - hemp. Are there any laws to stop a person from doing that?

Mr VATSKALIS: I think the police might have something to say about that.

Mr MILLS: Correct. Therefore, the next logical step has to be legislation, really. I am sure the legislation would not be produced - would I be right in guessing, minister - unless extensive community consultation occurs and a proper, reasoned and scientific debate is undertaken?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. However, you have to remember that people who grow marijuana want to do it in secret, they do not do it openly. People who want to grow, let us say, soya beans or cotton, would be quite open in their intentions. It would become clear when they were trying to acquire an enormous amount of land, in a place where they can actually have sufficient water.

Mr MILLS: I put it to you that it is quite possible for any land currently being used for horticulture could be converted to such purposes right now. There is not the legislation in place. I have a commitment from you that, if you are required to go down the path to further reinforce your ethical position of anti-GM, you would have to bring in legislation? Secondly, before that occurs, there would be extensive community consultation and a period of reasoned, scientific debate? Thirdly, there would be nothing conducted in secret, such as focus groups and polling to just see which way the wind is going before you make such popular decisions?

Mr VATSKALIS: We know very well which way the wind blows, because there is already significant opposition to GM cotton, not only in the Territory but in Australia.

Mr MILLS: Oh, you have done your polling?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr Wood interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let the minister answer the question.

Mr VATSKALIS: I am aware, when I went to Katherine before the election, even the member for Katherine, the then candidate for Katherine, said she opposes genetic cotton in front of everybody.

Mrs MILLER: So that is what you based it on?

Mr VATSKALIS: She knew what the people in Katherine wanted. She knew what appealed to Katherine.

Mr WOOD: What were the results of the trials?

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please, a bit of order here! We will have the minister answer one question at a time. You already asked about six questions, member for Nelson, on the side.

Mr MILLS: Before that next and, I would say, necessary stage occurs, before legislation is considered, we will have a period of proper debate?

Mr VATSKALIS: If and when the situation arises. We do not keep legislation hidden. We actually go out and talk to people, and people have input in all legislation we present.

Mr MILLS: I look forward to that debate. You are familiar with Western Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mr MILLS: I know you are. Been to the Kimberleys, up in the Ord area?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Are you still standing on the Northern Territory side of the border looking across, watching and waiting to see whether you are going to do anything about the developments on the Western Australian side?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I have had meetings with the minister in Western Australia and discussed the situation. Western Australia has not made a decision which way to go yet - whether alone to develop half of the Ord, all of their land, or go into partnership with the Northern Territory. We have been provided with documents from my Western Australian counterparts. The cost to develop the Ord is significant. It will need a lot of public money for infrastructure - and that is in Western Australia, not taking into account the Territory. They still have not decided and they have not had any proponents for what crops to grow.

In addition to that, in order to work within Western Australia, we have to overcome a number of issues like biosecurity, quarantine and the different legislation we have on the other side of the border. There is a lot of work to be done by the Western Australians first, and from our side, about the Ord River. It is not going to happen tomorrow.

Mr MILLS: From my understanding - and it would not be as comprehensive as yours, minister - it appears that the Western Australian side is actually waiting for the Northern Territory government to make some decisions too?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is not the case. The last meeting I had a few weeks ago - yes, 6 June - with the minister responsible for the development of the Ord, they had undertaken a review. They have undertaken a study of what is the most efficient crop to grow in the area. There are a number of issues; for example, the expansion of the Argyle mine that requires additional power, and the fuel potential for cassava, the remnant of the sugar cane. The sugar mill in the Kimberleys works and operates under capacity, so they need more sugar cane for the mill. The third factor is that the Western Australia government has been approached by Brazilian interests to grow sugar cane for the production of ethanol in Western Australia. There are a lot of things to be done before a decision even to start at the Ord River has been taken. Also, there is a significant group of people in the Kimberleys opposing the cultivation of GM cotton.

Mr MILLS: All right. To get to the stage of progressing this, have you - to use a word that is often used by government - 'committed' to this project, or are you still waiting and watching on our side of the border?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our original commitment with our Western Australian counterparts was to find out first of all how to proceed - because the first attempt failed - and what would be the way to proceed and to overcome all the problems. In addition to that, in order for us to do anything about the Ord River, we have to commence negotiations with the traditional owners, and we are waiting to find out whether Western Australia will offer, because there are traditional owners on both sides of the border. At the moment, it is a proposal. We agreed with the Western Australian government we would like to work together. However, until we see the final costs and the details of the project, we cannot make any firm commitment. We have provided money for a joint study done about the Ord River. We have a commitment to the Ord River.

Mr MILLS: How much was committed to this?

Mr VATSKALIS: Twenty thousand dollars.

Mr MILLS: Twenty thousand dollars?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes. It was a \$50 000 study. We provided \$20 000 and Western Australia provided the rest.

Mr MILLS: Has that study been completed?

Mr GOBBEY: Rod Gobbey, Executive Director of Primary Industries. The study to which the minister refers is a specific study into ethanol and its feasibility within the region. Whilst the study itself is likely to be made public by the contribution of \$20 000, we were involved in not only framing the terms of reference, but also in getting early advice to and from between ourselves and colleagues in Western Australia. As yet, the study has not been completed.

Mr MILLS: Minister, when is that likely to be completed and available for consideration?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: I do not have a final date. To some extent, we are in the hands of the Western Australians; they are running the process and we are involved in receiving information. However, I will advise the minister as soon as the report becomes available.

Mr MILLS: Thank you. I am sure the minister is looking forward to it. What negotiations have commenced with traditional landowners, with regards to this project?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have not commenced negotiations yet because we are waiting to see, first of all, the decision of the Western Australians. I understand the Western Australian minister just took the papers to Cabinet to be debated. I have not heard the outcome from this debate yet. There was not much point for us starting the negotiations with traditional owners if the Western Australians decided it was too expensive and they were not going to go ahead with the project, because it is going to be a very expensive project. It will require an enormous amount of money, especially on the Western Australian side, for new roads, power lines, channels, etcetera that has to be funded by the public. It was made clear by the industry that they are not prepared to do it, so we are anxiously waiting for the information to come from Western Australia.

Mr MILLS: You would be aware that if this project is given a green light on the other side of the border, we, therefore I would guess, be a fair way behind the game if we then decide to switch our green light on and go ahead.

Mr VATSKALIS: Not necessarily, member for Blain. My understanding is that all the workers will come from the Western Australian side. The Western Australians can make decisions about where the channel will go and how big it is. My understanding is that they will look at a solution in the channel to incorporate the potential for the Northern Territory because, to put another channel or lake in would be enormously expensive. Also, economies of scale make it more economically viable to have the Northern Territory as well. Should they decide to go ahead with that, and I hope they do, our government will seriously look at developing the Ord, because it will have enormous benefits for the region and for indigenous people who live in the area.

Mr MILLS: So, that last section, there are words of hope and support, that you are keen on this project.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, it is something we are looking forward to. However, as I said before, it is not going to happen to you tomorrow.

Mr MILLS: I know. I appreciate that.

Mr VATSKALIS: My prediction is that, if it is going to happen, it will in the next five to 10 years at the earliest.

Mr MILLS: I will leave my questions for a moment now.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any more questions?

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman, I know the minister said a lot of things on cotton and I suppose the problem here is that, if one was to respond to them, one would get into trouble for taking up time. In regard to cotton on the Ord, the Western Australian minister for Agriculture has said he would allow GM cotton to be grown on his side of the border. Considering that the Ord is supplied by a large dam which was built for irrigation, and that we are part of the Ord River Stage 2 in our part of the world, isn't it going to look strange that you would put a ban on cotton in the Northern Territory if, down an imaginary line, another state, using the same water we would use, in the same area would grow that crop which you would not allow to be grown in the Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. If this imaginary line with Western Australia stops our produce on the border, we would inspect them again for fear of potential contamination of their product, or the transport of insects. Quite happily, the other side of the border can grow sugar cane, which is actually a renewable source of energy; namely ethanol.

Mr WOOD: Could you explain what material is used to fertilise sugar cane?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have no idea because I am not a sugar cane farmer. I am happy for the department to provide that information.

Mr WOOD: Would it, at a guess, be fertiliser?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am pretty sure.

Mr WOOD: Fertiliser, minister, comes from where? The main part of nitrogenous fertilisers come from where?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is this a trick question?

Mr WOOD: It is. The minister made a statement that this is a sustainable industry. No one has been able to explain how you can grow a crop using fertiliser - mainly nitrogenous fertiliser in the case of sugar cane - which comes from oil in the first place. Then, we turn around and use that particular fertiliser to grow a crop to produce oil or petrol. So, how does that make sense?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said before, it makes more sense than drilling holes and pulling the oil out of the ground, never to be produced again - at least not in the immediate future. Not only that, it benefits us by producing ethanol which reduces the harmful gases emitted to the atmosphere by the engines that can burn purely petrol or diesel, or purely ethanol. For your information, the Brazilians have now developed an engine that burns pure ethanol. They developed a diesel engine that you can actually use a mix of ethanol and diesel, which is much more environmentally friendly than engines which use pure petrol or pure diesel.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I am not disagreeing with that, but you have to drill the holes in the ground to get the oil to make the fertiliser to grow the sugar cane, which then turns back into ethanol.

Mr VATSKALIS: You can make fertiliser from gas, which is not as polluting as oil. There is plenty gas in the Territory and Western Australia.

Mr WOOD: Gas comes out of a hole in the ground too.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, but it is nearly untapped. We have probably more resources of gas than we have with oil.

Mr WOOD: And, as you know, gas is a major greenhouse emitter and your own environmental impact statement has said that.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, I agree with you. However, binding it to ...

Mr WOOD: Anyway, it is a debate that I believe we should have because it also has a certain element of populism because there are other issues involved in the production of ethanol.

Grape vine leaf rust. It says in the budget that you have, basically, signed off on it. Am I correct in saying there has been an outbreak of grape vine leaf rust - it may have been you that told me - on one of the best plants you had seen in Darwin?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department told me that they had discovered one contaminated vine and, as a result, we cannot declare any Darwin areas as leaf rust free. We imposed another 12 months moratorium on the movement of plants. It will be another year.

Mr WOOD: So, there will some funding required for that year for surveillance?

Mr GOBBEY: The program over the next two years by way of continued surveillance and, indeed, new detection, will be dealt with from the normal resources from the Biosecurity and Product Integrity Division. The funding for the very major project over a number of years has been contributed mainly by southern and

eastern states. There is some discussion occurring at officer level about ongoing funding at that level, and that it will be determined over the next few weeks. However, be assured that a surveillance program will continue as part of routine business.

Mr WOOD: I note also that you have a \$340 000 decrease in expenses due to a legal settlement in 2005-06. Can you say what that legal settlement was?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that this is confidential and it has to remain confidential.

Mr WOOD: I remember a case related to a claim by a grower who had Panama disease, and when asked how much money ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it is not like that.

Mr WOOD: I know, but when asked the same question, I also got the same answer. It seems to me that when people sue the government then, surely, we should have some idea as to who sued them and how much they received?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, last time you asked the question, the Department of Justice was actually in the process of discussing and negotiating the situation with them, so we were not at liberty to disclose that information. When the court makes a decision, and the decision says that is to remain confidential, there is nothing much I can do about it. I do not want to be found in contempt of court.

Mr WOOD: No. Referring to the issue of Panama disease in bananas, can you give us an update of attempts by the government to find new varieties that could be Panama resistant?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are still examining the possibility to find a variety that is Panama resistant. We are currently testing 34 banana varieties that show some promise. Four have so far proven fully resistant and six show partial resistance. The problem, of course, is the fully resistant are not the type of bananas you want to eat; you might want to ferment or cook them, but not to eat it. We have not found anything that will provide resistance or partial resistance that looks like it can be a commercial Cavendish variety.

Mr WOOD: Am I correct in saying that the government has asked for 2% cuts across all departments, including your department?

Mr VATSKALIS: The government always asks for departments to operate efficiently, and to structure themselves to operate in an efficient way. The same thing happens not only government but in private companies. I believe it is the right of the government to ask the departments to be efficient. If this results in savings of 1.5% or 2%, that is good.

Mr WOOD: Is it true that your department has sacked one entomologist; that there is no technician now in Katherine in pathology, and there is only one technician when there were two in a similar department in Berrimah? Were those changes to staff related to cuts required by the government?

Mr VATSKALIS: No. My recollection is that we actually advertised for an entomologist in Katherine and we went through the recruitment process. I am not aware if Mr Carroll sacked an entomologist. However, the other person worked there in the seed laboratory, where there were two technicians. The volume of work in the seed laboratory was not that it would warrant two technicians. One of them has been relocated to other duties within the department. Mr Carroll?

Mr CARROLL: To give a response to the member for Nelson, nobody has been sacked. Given the difficulty of getting entomologists, the last thing we do is sack them. I would like to make a general point, if I may, Mr Deputy Chairman, that we do have significant difficulty attracting people. We actually had advertised the position in Katherine that the minister referred to. We had somebody from Queensland apply for it. They were selected, they were offered the job, and they turned it down. They said to us that the reason they did that was because they would have to take a \$20 000 reduction in their current pay. I cannot explain to you why a Queenslanders would apply for a job that was at a lower pay than the current pay they were on. We are now in the process of trying to fill that job.

We have similar problems with our technical staff in places like Alice Springs, where we have three P2 positions that we are having difficulty filling. In the geological side of the department, we are having great difficulty because of the current booming conditions in the minerals and energy industry, and there are a

number of vacancies. We are not sacking professionals; in fact, we are desperate to keep them. If you have any names, would you refer them to me please?

Mr WOOD: Was the seed lab originally closed down at one stage and then reopened?

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister? The answer to that is no. The reason for adjusting the staffing is because of the workload changing. The seed laboratory continues to operate and will continue to operate.

Mr WOOD: Was it the case there used to be two technicians in the diagnostic areas, and now there is only one?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: Not wishing to be flippant, we have a lot more technicians than two in the diagnostics area. We have a complete complement of staff across our range of several laboratories, albeit we have a couple of vacancies we are trying to fill. I am in almost daily contact with the Director of Diagnostic Services and we are managing the diagnostic services as a group to deal with the surge capacity as it emerges in one area versus another.

Mr WOOD: To me, horticulture is one of those areas of great potential, yet my understanding would be that we now have no more extension officers, and there are cutbacks on pure research in horticulture?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: The issue of extension within the horticulture crops and forestry groups as it is now is that, of the staff in the group, there is a total of 13 whose primary task is to be engaged in horticulture. There have been some subtle, but important, changes since last year. The horticulture group had its functions expanded to include crops and forestry. The three extension officers, while their roles are primarily the same, have been added to the total complement of staff of the expanded division.

It is within my business plan in the coming year to undertake a skills audit of all staff within the horticulture group and provide additional skills where needed to those people primarily involved in applied research so that our extension effort can be delivered through, hopefully, all staff within the division rather than a percentage of staff. We recognise the need for extension at the grower level and we are working hard at it.

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Nelson, it is my intention that extension officers should be out there, not lock themselves in offices. I would rather have people from my department visiting growers, rather than growers visiting people in the department.

Mr WOOD: I agree, minister. What I am really concerned about is the word that I heard that extension officers were going and you were having facilitators, which could mean anything.

Mr VATSKALIS: They are going to be extension officers, member for Nelson, and they are not going to be renamed either.

Mr WOOD: That is good. In regard to research, why is the government relying on more industry supported research, rather than, in such a small place like the Northern Territory, which is looking for markets, doing research on possible crops that people could take up and grow? I will give you an example. For instance, Coastal Plains Research Station, once upon a time, was a leading research station in vegetable varieties - not Asian vegetable varieties, although they did grow some. They had quite a number of Taiwanese varieties of cauliflowers and cabbages, yet, that has all gone out the door. Do you see your government's role in researching alternative crops that do not have the support of the bigger horticultural industries so that we can provide opportunities for people to come in and take up some of those possible opportunities?

Mr VATSKALIS: I would like to start by saying that the horticultural industry in the Northern Territory and in the rest of the country is changing all the time. The small farms start to disappear, and we have big companies coming to the Territory from down south. Therefore, when you have an industry that is already developed, I believe it is unfair to ask the government to continue to do research for them without them contributing. However, I agree with you, there are areas where we have to do research, and we will continue to do research. Wherever I go, I am always interested in research. During my last trip to Sabah, we had discussions with the minister that, if we identify plants from there, we would like to research them

and develop them. If we can have an agreement that they maintain the right, we can both profit from potential development of a particular product, be it flower or fruit. However, the stations will remain as research stations, and we are happy to work with the industry to develop new varieties.

Mr WOOD: The facts are that we do very little vegetable research anymore, compared to what happened years ago. When I worked on Aboriginal communities, the one place that we could bring Aboriginal people, and people like myself who managed a farm, to get on-ground advice and to get an idea of what can be grown - not from a book, but from what actually could be grown - was to come to either the Berrimah Research Farm or the Coastal Plains Research Station.

Do you see that, in light of the government's promotion of indigenous development for better outcomes when it comes to the provision of fresh vegetables and fruit, that the government, also from a research point of view, has a responsibility to play in helping those areas?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. That is the reason we now have a small hydroponic shadehouse growing vegetables in Darwin and Alice Springs, based on research done by the department. We will continue to research. For example, we are conducting research in vegetable growing systems, including maintaining soil health using crops, implementing best practices and the use of integrated pest and disease management principles. We do vegetable research including nutrition and irrigation on Asian vegetable production and taro nutrition and irrigation trials. We are ready to do that. We also propose to research Asian vegetable supply chain mapping project for producers, and a preliminary investigation into mechanisation opportunities for our vegetable producers. So, instead of doing research everywhere, we are now focusing our research where it is most needed.

With the indigenous people, I agree with you. The department has trained people to reintroduce market gardens back to communities. We train indigenous people in the horticultural industry and the Ti Tree grape industry. We believe the department has the potential to provide jobs for indigenous people, not only Primary Industry, but also Mines and Energy and Fisheries, and we actively involve and train indigenous people. I have seen photographs and videos of people actually putting market gardens in their communities now, and I am really pleased about that.

Mr WOOD: I do hope market gardens come back. The reality is, when I was on the substance abuse committee, I do not believe I saw any gardens, except at Ramingining, which was a private garden. As you know, horticulture is a seven day a week job and requires a lot of work. One of the difficulties in growing vegetables all year round in the Northern Territory is simply the climate. One of the reasons we have research is to try to identify a range of varieties of crops that can withstand the great range of conditions we have in the Northern Territory, and to be able to promote those varieties. I know we are only a small population, but there are not many other people who are going to do it for us unless we do the trials. Who else would be able to do those trials unless it was the government? Will the government consider at least changing some of its moves from dealing with the big people to coming back and doing research on some of those smaller crops that you once used to do?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe we have already done that, member for Nelson. We did research on mangoes for 25 years, and now we are directing our attention to other things that are not as well researched.

Mr MILLS: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman! With respect, I cannot see how you can assert that something happened 25 years ago. The Country Liberal Party was in power then. Nothing happened then!

Mr VATSKALIS: They started the research; they did some.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is no point of order. Can we continue? Minister, continue.

Mr VATSKALIS: One of the few things that the Country Liberal Party government ever did was the research on mangoes – to rephrase it - as the member for Blain said. However, the reality is we are refocusing our research and we have to refocus it. We have to find and introduce new varieties. The rambutan cultivars are really old and we need to do something about that.

Mr WOOD: Talking about varieties, as you would realise, we have a massive oversupply of mangoes at the moment. That variety is Kensington Pride, which is not the greatest variety for keeping and for transport. I have been told that the mango varietal trial at Coastal Plains Research Station is at risk of being pulled because there simply is not enough money to maintain that trial. Could you tell me if that is

true? Would that be a negative decision in light of the fact that we need to be looking at better varieties of mangoes if we are to keep our share of the market in Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: The mango industry has grown significantly. We have seen entering into the market new plants with new varieties that keep better than the Kensington Pride. At the same time, the department has done studies and research on storage, transportation, and modified atmosphere and heat treatment. We will continue to support the industry and to find ways of exporting mangoes and finding new markets. Unfortunately, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland produce the same fruit within a three-month period for the same markets and, to their credit, the industry is now looking for alternatives. It is polling down south in order to extend the period longer than three months. This is done with departmental assistance on irrigation, soil and everything else.

Mr WOOD: One part of that question was: does the government intend to continue on with the mango varietal trial at Coastal Plains Research Station?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey, please.

Mr GOBBEY: The Coastal Plains Research Station is one of a number of farms which is part of our critical infrastructure. Whilst there have been ebbs and flows in the work that happens there, it is within the work program of the Horticulture, Crops and Forestry Division next year to utilise that research and demonstration station for a variety of work.

Mr WOOD: Does that mean the varietal trials of mangoes is doomed?

Mr GOBBEY: There has been no decision made on the specifics of where the emphasis and the focus of that research will be over the coming while.

Mr WOOD: Is there any intention of closing down any of our research stations in the Northern Territory?

Mr VATSKALIS: The government has not made any decision to close any research stations in the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: As you know, the horticulture industry in the Northern Territory is very much in support of a compulsory horticultural business code. What is the government's position at the moment? Could you, as a representative of the government, give us an update of where that horticultural business code is at present?

Mr VATSKALIS: We strongly support the horticultural industry. We made our feelings clear at the Ministerial Council to Peter McGauran, the minister for Agriculture, that we do not support the hybrid model proposed by the Commonwealth. That brings us to agreement with most of the people in horticultural industries in Australia. However, the federal government said this is what they are going to put in place and they are not going to change.

Mr WOOD: On a slightly broader area of discussion, as you know, horticulturalists have to provide products to our two biggest supermarkets, Woolworths and Coles, after they have had certain checks done. I believe there is Farmsafe and Chemsafe, and all sorts of safe things that everyone has to abide by before those two companies will allow fruit and vegetables onto their shelves. What is your opinion, regarding the import of fruit and vegetables into Australia, that those two companies, Coles and Woolworths, do not request exactly the same type of requirement that local growers have to fulfil? Do you think that means we are not dealing on a level playing field?

Mr VATSKALIS: Estimates is to interrogate me with regards to the budget, not my opinion. However, I agree with you; it should be a level playing field for everybody, either imported or local produce. I agree with the comments. They want to have all the best practices, Chemsafe, Foodsafe, and everything else, but they should apply the same rules and regulations to imported stuff. Unfortunately, the Territory government cannot do much about it because that is under the control of the Commonwealth. However, we have made clear to the Commonwealth in regard to labelling of country of origin and the same with the standards, and that indication was given to us with importation of prawns from Asia. They were not very happy. We have to protect our own industry as well. These people produce fruit and vegetables cheaper than us, but they should apply the same rigorous tests to the vegetables when they come into the country.

Mr WOOD: I asked you that question because, obviously, you are on a ministerial group of agricultural or primary industry ministers and it is important. As much as the many politicians talk about having a level

playing field in the global economy, if a person in China is growing garlic and receiving \$1 a week, and Australian companies are growing garlic and paying \$400 or \$500 a week to workers, do you see that as an argument that could be put to the Commonwealth that says the price of the imported garlic should be modified so that it recognises the difference in wages paid, so that we actually have a true level playing field?

Mr VATSKALIS: We live in a global village, and I agree with you that farmers in China are getting paid \$1 a day. Prime Minister Howard, with his new industrial relations laws, has tried to do the same, so Australian people are getting paid \$1 a day, so that it would make it equal.

Mr WOOD: I do not support some of what the federal government is doing in other areas ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Neither do I, member for Nelson, neither do I.

Mr WOOD: Yes, but let us not get into that on this case. It was a serious question, and I used garlic as an example. I believe there is only one garlic producer now in Australia, in Tasmania, and all other garlic that you see in the shops in Darwin is imported from China. There seems to be no controls over what sprays have been used; it does not appear to be getting tested for chemicals as is required for Australian produce. People are being paid much lower wages than in Australia. Woolworths and Coles are not going to the grower in China and asking for a Chemsafe certificate. As the minister, would you put forward to the federal minister that, if we keep going down this path, we will be either sending our vegetable and fruit growers into a form of slavery for the big duopoly, or we will just simply be importing our primary produce?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you, member for Nelson, and all minister made it clear to the federal minister that something has to be done. However, we live in a global village. We cannot say that we are going to put a tariff on product from China to come to Australia so it will be equal to ours. When I was in the Health department, in Environmental Health, we used to actually have a sampling program of all produce in a supermarket to analyse for bacteria and chemicals, and we got results. In many cases, imported stuff was good. Occasionally, we found when imported stuff was not good, it did not comply with the standards, but we also found cases where domestic product did not comply with the standards. I agree with you that the same standards should apply to all produce, imported or local. It is probably something that we should get the Health minister to conduct an extensive food testing program in the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: There is a place that I always see when I go to the Douglas Daly, and it is called Fleming. Fleming is starting to look like something from Greek and Roman history. It has a series of silos. Who owns those silos? Are they being used and what is going to happen to a town like Fleming? That sounds like the name for a book.

Mr VATSKALIS: I cannot answer that, member for Nelson. The township is under the control of my colleague, the minister for Planning. With regard to the question about who owns the silos, I cannot answer your question.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, minister, but that town was built for an agricultural reason. The idea was that the Douglas Daly would become a main agricultural exporter. Could you give us an idea of where, from an agricultural point of view, the Douglas Daly is at the present time?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Gobbey.

Mr GOBBEY: In relation to the silos, it is my understanding that they are an asset of the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines and, as such, on our asset register. We do basic maintenance and care to ensure that they are in a safe condition, and that includes the weighbridge and the associated equipment. Over the past few months, I have been approached by a number of individuals who seek to use the silos and the associated infrastructure, potentially for other uses. It is the intention, at officer level, in the next little while to call for an open process to see if there are any expressions of interest to use that site more than it is currently utilised. If that comes to pass, it might be a very good thing for industry development in the local region.

Mr WOOD: Does that mean we are going to get a revitalising of perhaps some sort of agricultural industry, because I presume we have to fill the silos with something?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, that is our intention. That is why we have been maintaining the Douglas Daly Research Farm. That is why we are doing research on the best practice for cattle breeding and production and other horticultural activities.

Mr WOOD: You are not going to put moo cows in the silo, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mr WOOD: You must be going to grow some form of ...

Mr VATSKALIS: You can put soya beans.

Mr WOOD: Sesame seems to have been a pretty crop, but it has not taken off.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, it has not taken off because of difficulties to actually find a market to accept our sesame. They tried sending their peanuts and other produce.

Mr WOOD: I believe you also have silos in Katherine.

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mr WOOD: Does your department maintain those and are they used for any purpose at the moment?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we maintain them and they are used for various purposes.

Mr CARROLL: The silos in Katherine are leased to the Northern Territory Horticultural Association, which manages that site and uses the silos for various purposes, and maintenance is undertaken as required. Can I just add, because we are talking about estimates, Mr Deputy Chairman, that in terms of the Douglas Daly, only in the last week I have signed off expenditure of \$17 500 to bring the weighbridge up to scratch following a lightning strike, so that the people of the district actually have a facility to help them with their production activities.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I am very cognisant of time and we want to have a break. Do you have many more questions?

Mr WOOD: I have three questions. Would you like me to do them after?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would very much like so. I am going to call a break to proceedings now and we will reconvene in five minutes time, which is about 11.23 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will reconvene this session of the Estimates Committee and continue with the line of questioning from the Member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman, I better ask this question before I forget. Regarding camels - and you know where this question came from; the member for Brainting. There was no funding to the association. She says: 'Your answer to my question quoted incorrect figures of export numbers'. Do you know the correct figures? Do you know the communities that have invested heavily in infrastructure for the mustering of camels? How will you help these communities to ensure employment opportunities continue and market and contracts are reached? She gives the example of Docker River.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, the figures provided in parliament were actually the number of camels exported from the Northern Territory through the Port of Darwin. Last year, there were only 34 camels exported from the Port of Darwin to Brunei. With regard to the Aboriginal communities, the camels present an environmental threat in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and other areas in Australia where they live. There are approximately 600 000 to 800 000 camels out there. Even if we open an abattoir in the Northern Territory and we killed camels every day, we are not going to have an impact on the number of camels on the ground.

On the other hand, because nobody wants to invest the money in a camel abattoir in the Northern Territory, we have now approached the federal authorities to declare camel meat 'game meat'. If this happens, then camels do not have to be slaughtered in abattoirs. People can actually kill camels out in the bush as they do with kangaroos, process them, cut them, put them in the fridge, bring them to town, process them and sell them. That will be easier, more efficient, and will avoid the problem with abattoirs.

The other issue is that, if we try to export meat, the European Union especially has quotas. Game meat does not have any quotas for the European Union, so we will be able to export camel meat as 'game meat' to the European Union.

Mr WOOD: All right, just a couple of other questions. I forgot one issue in regards to pathology. Is it true that the CSIRO is pulling its pathology department out of the Northern Territory? If so, will that put more pressure on the Northern Territory to provide those services?

Mr VATSKALIS: The CSIRO wants to pull out from the Northern Territory. I was not very happy about it and we made very clear what we thought about their intention. When they came here and they had agreements with the previous government to come to the Northern Territory, and they received funding, the agreement was that they would be here to do work. Because they want to restructure their organisation to cut costs, they want to relocate most of their research to Queensland or to southern states. We are not happy about it and we told them so. We will lobby the federal government. We have actually put on the table all the agreements we have had with the federal government about the CSIRO presence in the Northern Territory.

Mr WOOD: Considering that your government made the decision to close down the GM cotton trial in Katherine, which CSIRO was a part of, would that closing down by your government also have had an effect on why CSIRO should bother to stay here, considering their research officer left the Territory because of lack of support for those trials in the Northern Territory.

Mr VATSKALIS: CSIRO does research in different states and different areas. I read an article the other day in the *North Queensland Register* that CSIRO is concentrating on animal trials and crop trials other than cotton. The Territory has live cattle export, mangoes, Asian vegetables, and fruit that has potential. I am pretty sure that the CSIRO can find a scientist in their pool of scientists to allocate to the Northern Territory for research relevant to the Territory.

Mr WOOD: Another question relating to horticulture. I was told that Agnotes may not be free any more. Am I right there, or will the production of Agnotes have to be funded, basically, from external sources. I presume, if that is the case, they would have to somehow find ways of recovering that money?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will ask Mr Gobbey to respond to that, but my intention is for the Agnotes to be free.

Mr GOBBEY: The Agnotes are produced through the Primary Industry Services Division, which is a small group of multiskilled, multidisciplinary staff who work across Primary Industry and Fisheries. I can assure the member for Nelson that it is not within my discussions with the acting director of that group to review any change in policy in relation to Agnotes.

Mr WOOD: Last question on live cattle, minister. There has been a lot of talk about the condition of roads in regards to live cattle. Is that still an ongoing issue with the expansion of the live cattle industry? What sort of results have we had from discussions with the Commonwealth and within your government to upgrade those roads?

Mr VATSKALIS: Roads are actually through the minister for Transport.

Mr WOOD: I realise that.

Mr VATSKALIS: However, as an ex-minister for Transport, I can tell you that the Commonwealth never intended to fund the unincorporated roads and they have still not funded - or they fund very little. This will be a continuous argument with Territory governments, irrespective of political persuasion, about the lack of funding for unincorporated roads.

Mr WOOD: Would it be true to say that you can fix that by declaring areas of the Northern Territory local government areas, because you know the federal government will not fund state governments for those sorts of roads? Anywhere else in Australia, the local government will receive that money but, because we do not have local government over those areas, that is the reason that we are not getting that funding.

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding is that there are unincorporated roads in New South Wales and Queensland that the federal government has funded. When we are asking for \$20m to fix a large number of roads in the Territory, the then minister, John Anderson, said no. At the same time, he allocated \$46m for road repairs in his own electorate. That is where the priorities are for the federal government.

Mr WOOD: Thank you minister. I am of the understanding that local government covers the entire New South Wales area and the entire Queensland area.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, I am not the Minister for Local Government. I suggest to speak my colleague, the member for Barkly, who is the Minister for Local Government.

Mr WOOD: I am more concerned about your area, which is live cattle, and whether you can give us a rundown of where you see live cattle heading in the next few years?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said in my opening statement, I am really worried that there is only one market for live cattle. The majority of cattle are exported to Indonesia. We are now starting to see opening markets in Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah. At the moment, we have an understanding with the government of Sabah for the establishment of an abattoir. I have authorised the allocation of one of my officers to the government of Sabah to oversee the abattoir, and I believe that the abattoir will open in August. That abattoir is built with Northern Territory expertise; it will produce Halal meat. We have strong links with Sabah and we are exporting a number of cattle to Sabah every year.

In January, I was on holidays in Sabah. I was fortunate enough to be introduced to the Deputy Chief Minister of Sarawak and we discussed the issue of cattle. I have noticed in the last few months, Sarawak is now re-importing Northern Territory cattle. It is my intention to go with the industry to Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, and China if necessary, to promote the sale of cattle to these countries so we have more than one market in place. We will continue to promote the sale of cattle because our strongest selling point is that our cattle are healthy, free from disease, and they are the type of cattle the people in South-East Asia like.

Mr WOOD: Lastly, a large number of cattle stations are now owned by indigenous people. Would you have any idea how many of those cattle stations are involved in live cattle export?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not have the numbers, but Mr Gobbey may be able to give it to you.

Mr GOBBEY: Sorry, I do not have the precise numbers but, if it helps, member for Nelson, typically, the cattle for the live trade are from the northern part of the Territory, with a little over 50% of the turnoff coming from that region. The cattle from the remaining part of the Territory go to southern and eastern markets.

Mr VATSKALIS: At the same time, apart from the exporting of live cattle, we are now bringing back into production indigenous cattle stations. We have had success in actually opening land for 25 000 cattle to be put on these stations. We also had a number of pastoral leases having agreements with indigenous people to rent part of the indigenous pastoral stations to put cattle on. Slowly, but steadily we are actually building a success story by bringing indigenous pastoral stations into production and having employment programs for indigenous people to work on these pastoral stations.

Mr WOOD: I know I said that was the last question, Mr Deputy Chairman, but sometimes the minister leads to another question. It is important to know those statistics, because there was a time when most cattle stations that had been taken over by indigenous interests had fallen by the wayside. Would it be possible at some time, minister, to present a report on that very issue and tell parliament exactly what is happening on those communities?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will be very happy to table one of the documents we produced about the Indigenous Pastoral Program. We are working with Indigenous Land Corporation, and we have seen some fantastic results. It has the support of both the NLC and the CLC, and it is a good story.

Mr WOOD: That is all.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that?

Mr WOOD: Yes, thanks.

Mr MILLS: I have a couple of further questions, Mr Deputy Chairman. Kangaroo harvesting. I know some locals have now become involved with kangaroo harvesting at East Point. I notice there have been approaches made to the Territory government about investigating the extension of a kangaroo harvesting industry in the Northern Territory. I understand that you have had some proposals put to you and you said that you would investigate. Can you give a report on those investigations?

Mr GOBBEY: The macropod - that is the kangaroo - industry nationally, if it is a domestic production it is regulated under the state and territory's meat hygiene, food safety legislation. If a proponent comes forward wishing to be licensed and accredited under that legislation, we would be happy to accommodate them and provide all assistance and training if necessary. If a proposal is to enter the export trade, we would work with our colleagues at the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service to facilitate industry development. Personally, I am not aware of any active proposals on the books at the moment. If there are, I would encourage my staff to work with the proponents and involve colleagues from NRETA as necessary, because there may be some implications there to do with resource management.

Mr MILLS: I understand, from a *Centralian Advocate* report mid-year last year, that there was a proposal. There was certainly an approach made to interests in the Northern Territory. Can I have a report on what is the status of that proposal?

Mr CARROLL: I have not seen it. We could find out if we have anything and let you know, if that is okay?

Mr MILLS: Thank you. The Kangaroo Industry Association Executive Officer, John Kelly, said that ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you like to take that on notice, minister?

Mr GOBBEY: I believe we have agreed we are going to write to them.

Mr MILLS: Good, thank you. Gamba grass: I was horrified on a visit to north Queensland to find on one of the pastoral properties there when the plane landed and the fellow said that they had just finished seeding the pastures with some seed for the next Wet Season, and it was gamba grass. A good report to you for your department, minister, is that, with those in the pastoral industry in north Queensland who know the work of the Northern Territory government, which extends some way back too I must say, appreciate the stance taken by the department here. Minister, are you winning the war against gamba grass?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, the reality is that gamba grass is very good for cattle, and is kept under control when you have cattle actually grazing it. Gamba grass becomes a problem when cattle are removed and it is allowed to escape, or is allowed to grow uncontrolled and becomes a fire hazard. Most of the problems we have seen is on properties that do not have cattle anymore. People have removed the cattle from the area and subdivided, but they have not done anything with gamba grass.

Gamba grass is a declared animal fodder, it is not a declared weed. In reality, it is not up to the department, it is up to the individual people to control gamba grass in their area, especially if they do not have any interest in the horticulture industry. It is not only gamba grass, but a number of other grasses. If you have cattle in the industry, they feed on it and they feed very well. I have personally had people telling me that, with some of the grass specimens in Central Australia, if that grass was not there during the drought, their cattle would starve. So, it is not really an issue of the weed being good or bad, it becomes good or bad due to circumstances, not because of the grass. Anything can become a weed. If you plant garlic and, left uncontrolled, it can become a weed.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I understand that, and thank you for that.

Members interjecting.

Mr MILLS: I tend to agree with you, by saying that in Western Australia there is a plant called Patterson's Curse that in South Australia is called Salvation Jane – same plant – one saves from the drought, the other one is a problem. Going to the point of this, though, can you describe the action that is being taken by your government to ensure that land owners control gamba grass on their holdings?

Mr VATSKALIS: We do not control weeds in my department, that is the responsibility of NRETA.

Mr MILLS: Not your business?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, for us it is not a weed, for us it is food.

Mr MILLS: I will hold that question for a later stage. It was going somewhere, minister.

You have already made reference to the abattoir aid for Sabah. How much aid goes to that initiative?

Mr VATSKALIS: We have provided financial aid, but it was built with Northern Territory expertise. We had one of our local people oversee the design and construction of the abattoir. However, because that particular person was not working with Sabah any more, the abattoir was not finishing properly. We allocated one of our people to work there. We paid his salary. I believe the government of Sabah paid for his airfares and accommodation, and he will actually oversee the completion of the abattoir.

Mr MILLS: Okay. On a similar matter, I understand some officers have also been doing some work in Papua New Guinea?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. We have a number of officers working in South-East Asian countries, especially countries very close to Australia, not only for meat, but also for weeds, insects, and vectors. We have developed really good relationships with different departments in the region. We also train people from other countries. Recently, when we had the exercise for the bird flu, we had two veterinarians from Sabah training with us.

Mr MILLS: It is very good to hear this, because in every agency we have opportunities to strengthen our ties to the region. With any of the funding that comes to support these engagements, do we access AusAid funding?

Mr CARROLL: If I may, minister? Wherever we can, we do, but we do not always get the outcomes we are looking for. There is always competition for AusAid money. We are keen, and we do apply for it. We have applied for it in the Primary Industry area as well as the Fisheries area.

Mr MILLS: Have you been successful in any of these projects in attracting AusAid dollars?

Mr GOBBEY: Much of the work that has been happening in Papua New Guinea and East Timor in recent times, whilst there has been a contribution from the Northern Territory government, a large proportion of costs are met under the ACR budget. ACR is an Australian Cooperative International - I cannot remember the acronym, I apologise. It is a fund administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and it largely comes under the umbrella of foreign aid.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That being the end of the questions regarding Output 1.2, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 - Fisheries

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.3, Fisheries. Are there any questions?

Mr MILLS: Firstly, minister, you stated that the water in Darwin Harbour is safe and, therefore, so are the fish: 'Let me tell you, if anyone tells you that you cannot catch a fish from Darwin Harbour and eat it, they do not know what they are talking about' - your own words. We all saw the images of plastic bags, condoms and raw effluent flowing into Darwin Harbour in living colour on the 6 pm news. On what independent scientific basis are you, as minister for Fisheries, giving these assurances?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, the department of Environment is responsible for sampling the water in the harbour, as they have done in the past. When I was working in Environmental Health in the Department of Health, we used to sample the water in the harbour, which is five times the size of Sydney Harbour. The reality is the volume of water there is enormous. With the effluent - and I do not say it is good or bad - this has been going on for the past 20 years; it is a reality. It sounds bad, but with the dilution factor, the fact is that most of the bacteria there would be dead after a period of time in the salt water. Also, I never received a complaint when I was Environmental Health Officer of people coming to me complaining that they ate fish from the harbour and they got sick. To date, nobody has come out and said: 'I have been sick because I ate the fish out of the harbour'. Most of the fisherman know where the outlets are and they do not fish near there, they fish in other areas in the harbour.

If you want to put it bluntly, I recall very well that I was more concerned about some of the drains from Winnellie. They used to pump hydrocarbons, oils and some chemicals into the harbour before we got stuck into them. Also, the stormwater drains when they are washing the roads. I would be more concerned when people fish around that area because of the potential pollution that can go into the harbour. The reality is, this pipeline is there and it pumps out sewage. It has minimal effect on the surface of the harbour.

On the other hand, we have a significant number of people using the harbour. Quite a significant number of boats are parked in the harbour every day, and very few of them have toilets. So there is a contribution from the fishermen themselves. I recall very well that, in the past when we had the naval exercises from different countries, most of the boats that used to come here, used to tie up next to the wharf and they used macerators and all the effluent would go out next to the wharf until we actually instructed them to go out to sea to empty. Of course, they were so big they asked Hannons to bring the big tankers to connect the Australian Navy and other nationalities' ships to the tanks.

As I said before, we will test the water. I am sure the water will come very good because of the action of sea water and because of the dilution rate. I will continue to eat fish caught in the harbour. I did actually yesterday and I will do it again.

Mr MILLS: That is very brave of you, and that is fine ...

Mr Wood: You will handle green ants.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, the member for Blain did not interrupt you.

Mr MILLS: It is a reasonable argument you put. However, the point of this is, just as your nuclear position has no sound scientific or independent basis, and your cotton position does not have a scientific basis, your assertion now, whilst reasonable for some ears, does not have an independent science to back it. Are you conducting independent analysis of fish in the harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: I told you before, the department of the Environment will conduct an extensive water survey in the harbour ...

Mr MILLS: They do not test fish.

Mr VATSKALIS: They will conduct an extensive survey in harbour, including popular fishing spots, to assess the quality of the water. This is the first step. If we find some problems in the water, then we will proceed and we will do something about it. The reality is that, if the water is clear, if the water has no contamination, do you think the fish will be really contaminated? It is pure logic, not politics - pure logic and health science.

Dr LIM: What if they feed off the mud like they feed off the water?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One question at a time, you are to direct your question as they are asked, not interjections.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, are you aware of what occurred recently in Sydney Harbour, another very large harbour? Perhaps the quality of the water alone may have passed some test, but toxins accumulate within the larger species that feed within that harbour. The point of this is: are you going to conduct independent scientific assessment of the larger marine animals within the harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: In Sydney Harbour, as you said, actually the dioxins were detected in the water first and then they looked at the fish and they found the dioxins. I was there when the report was released. We know that the biggest fish accumulate toxins, and we have the Spanish mackerel that accumulates ciguatera. We know that. Most of the fish the fishermen are fishing for here are not fish that concentrate next to the outlet; they are larger fish and deep water fish like snapper and others.

I have said before, the laboratory that we have in the Territory to analyse the water might be a government laboratory, but it is accredited and it will not jeopardise its accreditation by putting out false results. We also said the results that will come out will be provided to the public. I suggest once again, since this is the responsibility of NRETA, you ask my colleague, the member for Arafura, who is actually the minister for NRETA, as they are going to be conducting the testing.

Mr MILLS: Minister, you do not support the call from AFANT? AFANT has called for fish be tested. You do not support their call?

Mr VATSKALIS: As I said before, AFANT made a call, and my discussion with NRETA was to analyse the water. I also had discussions with people in the Health department who told me that, unless there is a

public health issue, they cannot see the reason why they should test the fish. Do we have a public health issue? We have an outlet, we have a ...

Mr MILLS: We do not know.

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, in that case, why don't we start sampling everything we see, as we do not know, we might find something. However, starting with the water analysis and finding out what the results are will give us a good indication on the health of the harbour. I tell you what: if tomorrow the water result comes in with, let us say, elevated levels of hydrocarbons, certainly I will be testing the fish. However, if it comes in clear I will not be testing the fish.

Mr MILLS: With respect, you have asserted that this has been going on longer than the term of the Labor government; it has been going on for 20-plus years. Whatever it may be would accumulate within the food chain; therefore, it would be important not to test the quality of the water today, but for those organisms that live in that harbour which potentially may have accumulated some contamination at higher levels. The whole thing could be dealt with, and your argument and your assertions could be reinforced and substantiated by scientific analysis. You are refusing scientific analysis to support your position?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, that is what I am saying. We are doing the scientific analysis, in the first stage, of the water. As I have explained to you

Mr MILLS: But you are a scientist.

Mr VATSKALIS: Exactly, and that is why I am proceeding. Most of the water that we pump into the harbour will dilute at enormous rates, and most of the bacteria that will come down that pipe will be destroyed or die in a very short period of time.

Mr MILLS: I suppose it is going to be a pointless argument but, you are aware of food chains, you are aware of the passing of contaminants from the lower order to higher order. If it has been going on for 20 years, it concentrates over a period of time. Your whole position could be completely vindicated with a scientific analysis of larger marine organisms.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can go on for ages about it. My suggestion is you should speak to your colleague, the member for ...

Dr Lim: Greatorex, it is.

Mr VATSKALIS: Greatorex, thank you. He would find it very easy to explain to you about the accumulation of heavy metals in fish. It builds up over a period of time, and that can be a threat - mercury, zinc, even silver. However, if a fish is contaminated by pathogens, by biological bacteria, the fish either get sick and die, or immediately pass this contamination on to somebody who eats it, and they will be sick. You do not accumulate levels of, let us say, e coli or salmonella continuously because, if you eat the fish where contamination has occurred with bacteria, you would get sick very quickly - even if you eat that fish within five days. However, if you eat an accumulation of heavy metals for five days, you are not going to get sick, but eat an accumulation of metals for 35 years, then you get sick.

Mr MILLS: With respect ...

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a different mechanism. I am not going to argue about that any more, for the simple reason that the department of Fisheries does not have any jurisdiction or responsibility, or the standards to conduct and compare the samples. Rather, it is the responsibility of NRETA to test the water and find out what they can about it. Even if it is a public health issue, the department of Health will do something.

Mr MILLS: As a proponent of a government which holds a very strong position in taking a whole-of-government approach, it is your responsibility, as it is equally for all members related to areas of joint concern.

I will go to another point - oh first, just to stay on this, minister. In Sydney Harbour, this did not come to light until there was some assessment of those fish. If those fish did not come on board looking a bit crook, it was not until they assessed it and they found that it contained high levels. Without that assessment, nobody would have known, and people could have continued on for a period of time.

Mr VATSKALIS: In Sydney Harbour, it was back to front. They found contamination in the fish. They originally did not find it in the water because they did not do any testing of the water. When they found the fish and tested the water, they found out that it was in the water. If we did the water first and found a level of contamination, alarm bells would start ringing and then we would go and test the fish.

Mr MILLS: Tidal movement within Sydney Harbour would be quite different than the tidal movement in Darwin Harbour, but I will move on.

Minister, you have a clearly-stated position with regard to illegal fishing vessels. One of the reasons we have great concern about illegal fishing vessels is that it puts our biosecurity at great risk. How, on one hand, are you calling for greater investment to halt illegal fishing on the basis that illegal fishing boats poses a biosecurity risk to the Northern Territory, but you will not immediately repair a pipe pouring raw sewage into Darwin Harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not recall there was a reshuffle and I got Power and Water. You should have asked minister Henderson about that, he is in charge of Power and Water. What do you want me to do? I have concerns about illegal fishing, and quite rightly so. However, that was not a question about fish you have asked. The minister will respond for Power and Water, or you can ask Power and Water on Friday morning.

Mr MILLS: Yes, I can ask and I will. However, it is to test the consistency of your argument. If the strength of your conviction with regard to illegal fishing is strengthened by your concerns about biosecurity risk, it would, therefore, follow that you would also be concerned about the pumping of raw sewage into the harbour.

Mr VATSKALIS: The difficulty you have there - and I have told you before – my concern about the effluent discharge into the harbour is much lower than the biosecurity from illegal fisherman. I explained to you before, because of our dilution rate and because of the way pathogens behave in an environment such as a salt water where they die from point of contact to about 10 or 15 minutes later. I have issues with illegal fishermen bringing dogs in that can contaminate local dogs with rabies; and people who are bringing in boats that have termites and insects. They will bring bottles that have mosquitos that can carry malaria. That is a severe threat, not only to our animals, but also to humans. It is a higher risk than the effluent being pumped into the harbour. The natural mechanisms in the harbour destroy the pathogens very quickly. Microbiology 101 will tell you that.

Mr MILLS: I accept that. However, in the absence of testing, and in line with your concerns, you said: 'I am more concerned about stormwater drains'. They may carry the toxins that I am referring to - who knows? But, in the absence of testing, we do not know.

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely, and we allocated money to educate people in Winnellie and other places, not to dispose of ...

Mr MILLS: Aah!

Mr VATSKALIS: It was your government, I worked under your government then and I ...

Mr MILLS: Well, I must apologise for that, but ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No, it was your government, we went out there and educated people ...

Members interjecting.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, please.

Mr VATSKALIS: We educated people not to dispose of chemicals or oils in the drains. It was a good program, because these things must not reach the harbour.

Mr MILLS: Well, it would perhaps motivate people, one way or another, if the larger organisms within the harbour were given a proper scientific assessment - either motivate to say, 'keep going on the right track', or 'watch out, we have some problems; we are going to have to stop pumping raw sewage into the harbour'. Maybe.

Are you aware of any recreational fishing person who has been contaminated or shown symptoms of heavy metal poisoning?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, I am not.

Mr MILLS: Anyone in your department?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not believe my department would receive these kind of reports, they would be going to the Health department.

Mr MILLS: Well, maybe, but it may have come from fish that they caught.

Mr VATSKALIS: Usually what happens is people ...

Mr MILLS: I am sure that through your system would affect you.

Mr FLAHERTY: Bill Flaherty, Assistant Executive Director of Fisheries. Some years ago, there were two people who presented to their doctors with elevated levels of arsenic and mercury. We tested the fish samples that they were able to supply that they said they had been eating. The levels in those were not elevated. I am not disputing at all that the two gentlemen's blood levels certainly had the elevated levels of both mercury and arsenic, but we were unable, either ourselves or Health, to demonstrate that it was associated with the fish.

Mr MILLS: Perhaps you can bat this away but, being aware of this incident and knowing the effects that this had on two Territorians, has there been any clarification as to how this occurred?

Mr VATSKALIS: First, the contamination of fish comes under the jurisdiction of the Health department, they do the testing and the analysis. Second, if there was a suspicion that fish were contaminated, that would be forwarded to NRETA, and NRETA would carry out the investigation. Our role is actually developing and regulating the industry; it is not to do the analysis. Other departments have the skills and expertise to do the testing and the analysis. We are happy to help, and you were quite right before when you said it is a whole-of-government approach. We offered our services to NRETA - our boats, our personnel - to help out and we will continue to do so. We point out the areas where we know that there is important fishing. However, it is NRETA and Health which do this kind of testing and analysis.

Mr MILLS: Minister, moving to a different area. You made reference to boats - vessels that you have. Can you describe the efforts that are made by your government to protect our waters?

Mr VATSKALIS: The Police Marine Enforcement Unit comes under the Police department. We regulate the regulations, they administer our regulations. My information is that the Police Marine Enforcement Unit is out there. They had recent success. You may recall the issue in Borroloola where the tourists had a significant volume of frozen fish with them. The Police Marine Enforcement Unit has been out there. Apparently, have recently been talking to a lot of crabbers, they are doing a tremendous job.

Mr MILLS: You are satisfied with the effort of the Northern Territory government in maintaining its part of the fight to protect our waters against illegal fisherman?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, member for Blain, this is the argument used by the federal government; that we should actually protect our coastline from illegal fisherman. There is an argument there: these illegal fishermen have travelled 400 km from their borders to the Territory coastline and you expect us to catch them when they arrive here? I thought we had a Navy to protect us from illegal fishermen – and AFMA and Customs.

Our responsibility goes to the three miles; the rest is federal responsibility. Let us say we catch fishermen in the Territory fishing illegally. What are we going to charge them with? Not having a licence to fish in what waters? At the same time, these people have breached quarantine legislation, which is Commonwealth; migration legislation, which is Commonwealth; and probably sailing through Commonwealth waters with their unseaworthy ship, which is Commonwealth. Even if I catch them, I cannot charge them under any of that legislation because it is Commonwealth responsibility, not ours.

We have offered the Commonwealth to work together effectively. We have told them that we are prepared, should they find illegals, to have indigenous marine rangers work with them because it has to be a coordinated approach on a national level, not a political level. I do not care who is in Canberra, Liberal or

Labor. I made that clear to Senator Abetz and he agreed. It is bigger than me and him and our political future; it is the future of Australia and the Australian resource. They allocated \$395m, almost \$400m. Great. However, not even \$1 will go to the indigenous marine rangers, the people who can actually patrol our waters, our coastline, our tidal creeks; the people who have discovered all these illegal fishermen hiding in tidal creeks; the people who have notified Customs - and it took Customs 24 or 48 hours to go there; the people who, the other day, went and saw the illegal fishermen with a dog on the beach and, when they approached the illegal fishermen, they were threatened with a machete.

I will say it again, we have so much we can do here. We can only administer our Territory legislation within three miles of our coastline. You do not expect the Territory or any other jurisdiction to patrol international waters when these people, unobstructed, can sail 400 miles and go all the way from their borders to Borrooloola fishing illegally in our waters, exterminating our shark fishery, and now starting into the coral fish.

Mr MILLS: With respect, it appears that the greater part of the energy is spent having a squabble over the fence. For a government that is seeking to enter into partnership agreements and work together in a cooperative way to address issues that are primarily the responsibility of the Territory, you are spending more of your time arguing with other stakeholders. Can you please describe the levels of cooperation that actually exist rather than border disputes?

Mr VATSKALIS: I have an excellent relationship with Senator Abetz. To his credit, he has come to the Northern Territory three or four times. Senator Abetz met with me and we made a presentation. That surprised him; his department had not made a presentation. Senator Abetz asked for our ideas. I provided them. Some of them have actually been incorporated into his project to battle illegal fishing. One of the things I told him is that it should be a coordination role for somebody who can coordinate; that it should be the Navy - and that has been implemented.

There is no squabble. As a matter of fact, on 11 July 2006, Senator Abetz, the ministers from Western Australia and Queensland and I will be meeting again to discuss illegal fishing. I had a squabble with the previous minister for Fisheries because he refused to listen or do anything about it because, according to him, there was no problem. To his credit, Senator Abetz, the moment he took his portfolio, realised there was a problem and he made his first trip up here. We have an excellent relationship and, as you probably noticed, there are no squabbles with the media - there is nothing from me against Eric Abetz in the media. Instead, we prefer to work together. As I said before, it is more than Labor or Liberal; it is an Australian issue, and we have to address it as an Australian issue.

Mr MILLS: Okay, I agree. I ask you to describe the cooperation that is actually occurring, the partnerships that are occurring, rather than the problems there are?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are willing and able. I said to Eric Abetz: 'Provide us with \$16m over four years and we will train more indigenous rangers, we will deploy them, they can come under your umbrella, they can become part of your Protect Australia team'. I am happy to work with that and, if necessary, we are prepared to amend our legislation to incorporate elements of our legislation, if possible, to get these people if they come near our coastline. We are already looking at that and that is what I am going down to discuss.

Mr MILLS: I will leave it there for now, other members have questions.

Dr LIM: You quoted about the toxicity, or toxins in the harbour that may or may not affect the fish. You and I both know that the fish swim in the water and, while you are not responsible for the water, the fish will be part of the food chain. Bigger fish feed in the water on fish off the bottom of the harbour, similar to crabs and other water creatures. Do you know if those creatures there are contaminated by any chemical, toxin or pathogens that are not sufficient in concentration to kill them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, once again I say my department does not do analysis. My department does not do testing. It is clearly the responsibility of NRETA and the Health department. I cannot answer that question because I do not have that information.

Dr LIM: As the minister for Fisheries, you would surely be responsible for the quality of stock in our waters. As minister for Fisheries, you have repeatedly restocked our rivers and lakes with aquaculture fingerlings, so you are responsible for stock. Am I not correct?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Okay, if you are responsible for stock, are you not also responsible for the quality of the stock which Territorians consume from recreational fishing?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am also the minister for Primary Industry, which means I overlook the pastoral industry that produces cattle, their slaughter and their sale in supermarkets. Are you trying to tell me that I also have to look after the quality of the stock? Do you tell me that I have to look under to see the shelf parameters of the meats sold at the supermarket? That is clearly a responsibility of the Health department that has a responsibility for public health and safety. As a previous health professional, that was my responsibility. I used to go out and conduct sampling of foods, which we analysed and we actually got results in order to proceed with action or not.

Dr LIM: As a former officer of the Health department, once you did the analysis, would you report that analysis to your superiors and, ultimately, to the minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Dr LIM: And would a minister then communicate that to his colleagues?

Mr VATSKALIS: As a matter of fact, we actually communicate on an officer level rather than a minister. The minister will receive an update. At officer level, we communicate with each other. For example, if we had discovered there was heavy metals or contamination in the harbour, we would straight away have talked to NRETA. In the past while I have been a minister, I have not seen anything come to my desk saying there is a problem with, let us say, the shelf parameters of fish caught in the harbour. Should I have received that, rest assured I would have acted very quickly to issue instructions or directions about the safety of the fish in the harbour.

Dr LIM: In your response, what you have said to me is that the Minister for Health has communicated with you regarding the harbour and everything is fine.

Mr VATSKALIS: NRETA has provided advice and, on many occasions, they said they did not find any ...

Dr LIM: What you are saying is that you have not communicated by ministers responsible for other portfolios regarding the harbour and its contents.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, do not put words in my mouth. What I am saying is, there is a responsibility for officers to talk to each other. Should somebody in NRETA find something wrong - I am pretty sure it happens; it happened in my time - they would advise the officers in the Health department and, if there is cause for alarm, certainly the relevant minister would be advised. However, as the minister, I have not been advised there are problems in the harbour.

Dr LIM: I am satisfied with your answer, minister, and I will proceed with the questions. What you are saying is that you have not received any information from your department that there is an issue of concern with the fish or other sea stock under your responsibility. I can also, obviously, make the assumption from your response that the Minister for Health or the Minister for NRETA have not received any negative reports either. Is that what you are saying?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, should the department of Health find something wrong, let us say, with fish in the harbour, their first action would be to notify the relevant officer in NRETA and in my department. Then my department would go through the chain to me. I do not expect the Minister for Health to come to me and tell me: 'I have a result about the fish'. I expect my department to provide this advice.

Dr LIM: So, you have been satisfied? I am making the assumption that you made the assumption that the Minister for Health is happy with the quality of the water in the harbour and, because he has had testing done, he is satisfied with the results?

Mr VATSKALIS: I do not make any assumptions, I simply say that I have not received any information through my department, through the chain, to say there is something wrong with the harbour. I am satisfied with that.

Dr LIM: Okay, so you are satisfied with that. To be satisfied with the quality of stock in the harbour, you have made some assumptions; the assumptions being, the Health Minister is not concerned, therefore, I do

not need to be concerned. For you to make the assumption that the Health Minister is not concerned, the Health Minister must have had some testing done to be not concerned. Am I not right in that logic?

Mr VATSKALIS: You make a lot of assumptions here.

Dr LIM: No, no. I am saying that you are saying it is okay and, because you ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, you can ask the question in a respectful manner.

Mr VATSKALIS: In your previous life you were a doctor. Let us say you examined a child and you found that child was abused, you were legally obliged to report it to the authorities. Okay?

Dr LIM: Correct.

Mr VATSKALIS: You would not report directly to your minister, would you?

Dr LIM: You should report to the police. If it is child abuse you have to report it to the police.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, you would not go to the Police minister and say: 'I have a child that has been abused' ...

Dr LIM: You report to the police.

Mr VATSKALIS: You report to the relevant authorities ...

Dr LIM: The police.

Mr VATSKALIS: ... and, eventually, very often, they will advise the minister. This will happen here. I do not expect Peter Toyne to come and tell me there are problems in the harbour, at Mindil Beach markets, or somewhere else. His officers should notify the relevant departmental officers and, then, the department should notify me. I expect that. I do not make assumptions. I do not know what has happened in the Health department; I do not want to know. They have their responsibilities and I have mine. However, should something go wrong, there should be a notification to my department. The department, through the director or CEO, will advise me, and then I will take appropriate action.

Dr LIM: I will leave it. That is all for now, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, you are waiting with baited breath.

Mr WOOD: Oh, baited breath, that sounds like another pun there.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, the previous example that the member for Blain brought up, he asked me and that is exactly what happened. The department of Health immediately notified NRETA and ourselves that there were some issues, and the department proceeded to do the examination and, eventually, it found its way to the minister.

Mr WOOD: I will be as quick as possible. Did the Darwin Aquaculture Centre need to obtain a waste discharge licence for waste it recently - so it was reported in the *NT News* – flushed into Darwin Harbour?

Mr VATSKALIS: My understanding, member for Nelson, was that the discharge took place because of a malfunction. It was unintentional. When it was detected, immediately the department changed the way it was discharged. They stopped the discharge and they actually packed up their waste, which is actually fish faeces and pellets - and they put them in 44 gallon drums and took them for disposal at Shoal Bay.

Mr WOOD: Was there much discharge, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I believe it was less than 20 kg.

Mr WOOD: Minister, I had this question from a constituent. He believed he had seen an ad in the *NT News* once, that you had some money set aside for various recreational fishing initiatives. Where was it advertised, because I have not been able to find a copy of the advertisement? What was it about? Have you had people write back with their various ideas on what the money can be used for?

Mr VATSKALIS: I saw that. It was published in the *NT News* Saturday edition. It was calling for fishing infrastructure suggestions. I will leave it to Mr Flaherty to respond if there were any suggestions.

Mr FLAHERTY: We have advertised recently for expressions of interests for the next round of fishing infrastructure work. That is about to close. A number of expressions of interests have come in. I am not sure of the complete number, but several have come in.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson, I can confirm also that I have seen the advertising. One of my constituents has been on to me about the matter.

Mr WOOD: What was the date of closure?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is still open, I believe.

Mr WOOD: No, that is why I asked him about closure.

Mr VATSKALIS: It was three weeks ago. I do not recall the exact day, but it was the Saturday edition of the *NT News*.

Mr WOOD: You do not know which Saturday edition, because I could not find it?

Mr VATSKALIS: You could look at the public notices. There are not many Saturdays in a month. If you go to the last month, you will probably find it.

Mr WOOD: I thought you might be able to help.

Mr VATSKALIS: We will be able to send you a copy.

Mr CARROLL: We will forward a copy of the ad to the member for Nelson for his information.

Mr WOOD: This is from the member for Braitling. The Seafood Festival was a great success, she said. Last year, the government did not support it, and I believe the organisers made a loss and, hence, increased the entry fee this year. On what grounds was the decision made not to support the Seafood Council?

Mr VATSKALIS: That is not true, member for Nelson. We actually supported it. We provided a grant of \$10 000 last year and \$10 000 this year.

Mr WOOD: I am lucky I said that was a question from the member for Braitling. The other question is about the government's policy on commercial fishing. When I look at AFANT's sites, there is talk about closing another seven coastal net licences. I believe there are about 14 all together. What is the government's intentions regarding buying back commercial fishing licences? Does it have any opinion on whether Northern Territory people should be entitled to buy not imported fish or farm fish, but wild catch fish at their local fish and chip shop?

Mr VATSKALIS: I agree with you. There are 14 developmental coastal net licences. Out of them, only one, I believe, is active at the moment?

A witness: Two.

Mr VATSKALIS: Sorry, two. The other 12 are sitting down and doing nothing. We suggested we would like to buy them back because, when you remove the effort you increase the number of fish you can catch, and most of them actually do not catch a lot of fish. Some of them have probably gone in because they had all the time and operated because it is a job or a hobby. However, I agree with you that people should be able to eat wild fish. AFANT, as an organisation, can lobby for a lot of things, but the government will make a decision, based not on what that lobby group wants, but what is good for the overall public.

Mr WOOD: So, you do support a viable commercial fishing industry?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are not closing the fishing industry; we only remove licences where most of them do not want to operate and do not want to be there.

Mr WOOD: Over the years, there has been, at least since I have been in parliament, one of the great political debates, especially around election time, of AFANT versus the commercial - or recreational fishing versus commercial. I always felt to some extent that that argument was lopsided.

Mr VATSKALIS: To their credit though, AFANT is able to sit down, with the commercials and other interests, and work very well and very efficiently. Hence, we have the program we have in the five-year plan, 10-year vision for the barramundi industry. AFANT will be only concerned in areas that affect them, like barramundi and some of the iconic fish. They are not interested in Spanish mackerel, they mainly focus on the barramundi rather than on other species.

Mr WOOD: However, of course, when the tourists come up here and they go to the fish and chip shop and they see barramundi there, can you guarantee that that barramundi supply will continue, or are we going to depend on farmed and imported barramundi?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, when you have a fish and chip shop, you buy a lot of fish, some of them are local, some of them are not local, Some of them come from Thailand - pelagic and other kind of fish. A lot of the local firms do not want to buy local barramundi because they find it very expensive. Most of the local barramundi finds its way down to the southern states for the Sydney market, or to America. Again, I agree with you, we should be able to get locally caught fish. I believe there are a number of people in the Northern Territory today who have licences to operate across the Territory and catch fish, process it and sell it.

Mr WOOD: This is the last question, minister, and this may require to be on notice. Since self-government, how much has the government expended on the buy-back of fishing licences? How many licences were there then and how many are there now?

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take it on notice.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, could I ask the member for Nelson to restate your question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, since self-government, how much has the government expended on the buy-back of fishing licences? How many licences were there then and how many are there now?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate No 8.1 to it.

Mr WOOD: That is all, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the mud crab industry. How much consultation was there done with the mud crab industry before you implemented the new size?

Mr VATSKALIS: About two years. We were talking to the industry for nearly two years. Unfortunately, the industry was very reluctant to come to the table. They came to the table when I called them in and told them the decision has been made; they either be part of the process, or the decision would be made in their absence. They came, they worked with us, they sat down with the department, and a decision was made. I understand that the crabbers are not very happy but, if we did not make a tough decision at this stage, I do not believe we would have a crabbing industry in the next few years.

Mrs MILLER: From your reply just then, you said two years consultation with the industry, but they were not talking to you?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, no. I said that we were talking to ...

Mrs MILLER: So, that is not actually consultation.

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the organisation received the wrong advice and they thought that if they stayed away from the negotiating table, they would be able to get away with it. Well, they did not. We were talking to individual members of the industry and other stakeholders - because it is bigger than just the industry itself. We have to discuss it with other people as well. When I called them in and told them they had to be part of the negotiations, it was about 18 months ago, so they started talking to us then.

Mrs MILLER: So, you actually told them they had to be part of the negotiations ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely.

Mrs MILLER: ... but you had also made the decision ...

Mr VATSKALIS: No.

Mrs MILLER: You actually made a decision that has not been popular with them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Mrs MILLER: You have consulted with them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Absolutely. We presented all the scientific facts and figures, and they were not very happy. They made that clear to me. I made it very clear to them that my decision was not because I wanted to, or because AFANT wanted to, but based on the scientific information. When you have a fishery that is going from 1000 tonnes, 1200 tonnes a year down to 300 tonnes a year within three years, you have a problem. When you have a fishery that has a serious decline of catches, and they have to significantly increase their effort to catch the same number of crabs, we have problems.

Yesterday, I met with the industry again. The industry and the department went to Roper River and Borroloola. People in Roper River reported that they are catching a good number of large crabs. The people in Borroloola do not. Obviously, the crab population at Borroloola has not recovered yet.

Mrs MILLER: When are you going to review that decision? Are you going to review the decision that you made, and change those sizes?

Mr VATSKALIS: I said to the industry that we would undertake a stock assessment. We allocated money for the stock assessment, and I publicly stated if the stock assessment comes back and says that the population is healthy and has recovered, I will review the decision.

Mrs MILLER: When do you plan to do that, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: It does not happen in one month. It will take a period of time, probably a year. However, within a year we will be able to know if there is a decline or increase in the crab population.

Mrs MILLER: So, you will make a decision in 2007?

Mr VATSKALIS: Based on the outcome of the stock assessment.

Mrs MILLER: Right.

Mr VATSKALIS: For your information, the report I received is that in Borroloola they are catching a lot of small crabs, but not sizes that they can take. That is a good indication, but I have to rely upon the scientists.

Mrs MILLER: Are you able to tell me how many mud crab fishermen were affected by this decision?

Mr VATSKALIS: Every commercial mud crab fisherman was affected by this decision, because we increased the size of the crab they can legally take.

Mrs MILLER: How many was that? How many mud crab fishermen?

Mr VATSKALIS: Forty-nine licences.

Mrs MILLER: Forty-nine. What has been the economic effect to those mud crab fishermen having the size reduced?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to take this question?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Flaherty.

Mr FLAHERTY: The economic effect is too early to tell because the new size limit has only recently come in. As the minister indicated, the report from the Roper is that they are catching good numbers of crabs. To determine what the economic effect has been, it is too early to tell; it is only in the very early days of that impact. We did some numbers - to be more fulsome with the answer - of estimates of what the impact might be of change in size and we have given that to industry. However, until people are out there and catching, we do not know, we cannot tell.

Mrs MILLER: Have you set a date to review?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, as I said, that will depend on the stock assessment. The stock assessment will need to be comprehensive in order for us to do so. One thing I would like to say is that the decision was not based on our own scientific assessment; it was actually based on a scientific assessment done by the scientist employed by the crabbing industry. In his report to the crabbing industry, he said something has to be done. He knows it will cause financial pain but, if it is not done now, it is going to cost more pain in the future. Even their own scientists said that something has to be done.

Mrs MILLER: Is that scientific report available and published?

Mr VATSKALIS: Our scientific report is available. If you want the crabbers' scientific report, then you can ask the crabbing industry to provide you a copy.

Mrs MILLER: I am asking for a copy of your scientific report.

Mr VATSKALIS: A copy of my scientific report will be provided to you any time.

Mrs MILLER: Can I request through the Deputy Chairman that I receive a copy of that scientific report?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we will get you a copy.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I do not think you need to take that as a question on notice.

Mrs MILLER: That is all I have in relation to the mud crab industry.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr MILLS: The fishing platform in Palmerston. There is a clearly described need and, in fact, type of platform that could be put in, in Palmerston. The community have been consulted. They have ticked off on it. However, to this date, we have had indications that there is going to be some kind of response but, five years later, we have had nothing like the community has expected for the Palmerston boat ramp. When will we see some action on the Palmerston boat ramp?

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Blain, the government provided \$150 000 to the City of Palmerston under the previous infrastructure plan we had in place. They utilised that money to do a review and assessment and employed a consultant. My understanding is that the boat ramp in Palmerston is owned by the City of Palmerston. Have we seen any outcome of that review yet? You can respond to that.

Mr FLAHERTY: No. I understand they have done some costings on it, and that it is a substantial cost, well in excess of the amount that government has provided. Where Palmerston has gone from there, I am not sure.

Mr VATSKALIS: Let us not forget that we called for expressions of interest now for another round of fishing infrastructure. Nothing stops the City of Palmerston to put a bid in for that.

Mr MILLS: That same ad that went to the member for Nelson, I am happy to have that photocopied.

Mr VATSKALIS: We are happy to work in partnership with Palmerston!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That being the case, I conclude consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 - RESOURCE INDUSTRY MANAGEMENT
Output 2.1 - Minerals and Energy

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Resource Industry Management, Output 2.1, Minerals and Energy. Are there any questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes. In the 2005-06 Budget Paper No 3, at page 145, there was an expectation that your department would receive 50 applications to explore for petroleum. It appears in this year's budget paper, page 227, that your expectation is that that will only be 10. Why is that?

Mr CARROLL: Those figures are estimates and give an expectation of what the industry might do in the coming year. Clearly, our estimate was not accurate. I suppose we need to learn from what happened. It is the marketplace at work in this. It is basically our best guess.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. This is Budget Paper No 3 at page 227. There is a reference to site report incidents, and it has increased. Can you tell me why that is?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, would you like to refresh where there is ...

Ms CARNEY: I am matching up the questions that we did. It is there somewhere, minister. Perhaps I will redo it this way, while I am looking down the page. Has there been any increase with site report incidents?

Mr VATSKALIS: Since 2002, with the introduction of the *Mining Management Act*, there has been a 51% decrease in the Territory of lost time injuries, and approximately 57% increase in the report of non-LTIs - lost time injuries - including medical treatment and first aid care. Also, under this requirement, the companies are obliged to report every single incident that takes place on a mining site. That reflects the increase in site reporting.

However, on the other hand, I have to say that safety in mines in the Northern Territory, since 1988, has significantly increased. If you have a look at the graph that has been produced, there is a downward trend continuing, very similar to the downturn we experienced in mining incidents in the Northern Territory. In addition to that, if you look at the compensation plans for the mining industry and compare it, let us say, with the construction industry, you will see that the mining industry has a downward trend while the construction industry has an upward trend. That indicates that safety in mines has improved significantly.

The department has taken steps to further strengthen occupational safety on mine sites. We have appointed an independent investigator who reports directly to the CEO. As you probably know, we have not hesitated to take, for the first time ever, people to court. For the first time ever, we have charged a supervisor with an offence under the act. All these actions were successful. The industry continues to get the message: we will not tolerate injuries and deaths in the mining industry.

Ms CARNEY: Under the *Mining Management Act*, there is a requirement to establish a Northern Territory Mining Board. Is that the case?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Ms CARNEY: Can you tell me the cost of running that board in the last 12 months, and also, what recommendations it has provided to you as minister? There is a third part: can you outline current investigations, if any, that it is undertaking?

Mr VATSKALIS: It is a requirement to appoint a board. The board comprises of at least five members who are appointed by the minister to the recommendation of representatives of the industry. Also, they are nominated by industry organisations. The membership includes corporate industry expertise. The chairperson is appointed by the minister from board members; that position cannot be a public servant. The current members of the board are: Ms Christine Charles, Group Executive, Environment and Social Responsibility, Newmont; Mr Brian Fowler, Manager, Health Safety and Environment, Newmont; Mr Didge McDonald, union representative, Trades and Labour Council; Ms Gillian Jan, Director Authorisation and Evaluation, public servant; Mr Chris Salisbury from ERA, Manager Operations; Mr Brian Hearne, General Manager, McArthur River Mine; and Mr Ron Matthews, Exploration Manager of Cameco.

The Mining Board makes recommendations on mining safety, on compliance and enforcement policy, the role of the Chief Investigator, *Mining Act* review, Mining Board business plan, and indigenous issues and reports to the minister. With regards to the cost, I cannot give you an answer. I will ask Mr Richard Sellers to provide you information about the cost.

Mr SELLERS: Unfortunately, we will have to get that to you. I do not have that with me at hand.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to take that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: I am happy with that.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: Minister, what was the cost of running the Northern Territory Mining Board for the last 12 months? There were two other parts of my question. What recommendations has the board provided to you in the last 12 months and what, if any, investigations are currently under way? Could you answer those questions please?

Mr VATSKALIS: The board does not conduct investigations.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could we get clarification of that?

Mr CARROLL: The board does have power to conduct investigations, but none of them have been referred to it and there have been none in the last 12 months.

Ms CARNEY: Who would refer ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Until we have got into that question, just clarify that question on notice, Leader of the Opposition.

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Deputy Chairman, it is a different question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, I have to give a number for this. I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that question. I thought it was a supplementary, sorry.

Ms CARNEY: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice. I allocate question No 8.2 to it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, would you like to restate it, or are you happy with the second question, minister?

Ms CARNEY: Who would refer investigations to the Mining Board, given that it is the case that it can only do it upon referral?

Mr CARROLL: The minister or the minister's delegate, if he delegates it. I do not know that he has delegated that power, though.

Ms CARNEY: So there has been no referral in the last 12 months?

Mr CARROLL: There has been no incident to refer. However, there have been issues referred to the Mining Board to look at which are not what you would call investigations, but advice.

Ms CARNEY: The other part of my question was: what recommendations has the board given to the minister in the last 12 months? Can you outline what they were?

Mr SELLERS: The areas that they have been deliberating on are mining safety statistics, compliance and enforcement policy, the role of the Chief Investigator, review of the Mines and Petroleum Management Division, land access for the extractive industries, uranium policy, *Mining Act* review, Mining Board business plan and various reports from industry members, indigenous issues, regional development, and capacity building within industry.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. Has the board made any recommendations to the minister on any of the issues the board has been considering in the last 12 months?

Mr SELLERS: The areas of deliberation have mostly been in discussion. I do not have at hand any recommendations that have come from that, but I am willing to check for the Leader of the Opposition and report back, if you like.

Ms CARNEY: Yes, thank you.

Mr CARROLL: I can also add that, after every meeting there is a report that goes to the minister about what they talked about. The issues do go to the minister but there have not been any specific recommendations that I can recall. We will check that and get back to you.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so I will ask the question on notice, given the, albeit small level of uncertainty.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy to take that as a question on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Sure. I am happy with that.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, for the purposes of *Hansard* could I ask the Leader of the Opposition to restate your question?

Ms CARNEY: What recommendations were provided to the mining minister by the Northern Territory Mining Board in the last 12 months?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have acknowledged that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate No 8.3 to it.

Ms CARNEY: You listed the people who are on the board. How many full-time or part-time staff work for the board?

Mr SELLERS: There is a part-time position that sits within the compliance area. Currently, Mr Keith Tayler undertakes that role. We are also in the process of employing a person who will spend roughly 50% of their time doing administrative services for the Mining Board and 50% of their time doing administrative services for the Veterinary Board run through Primary Industry. That position is only just going through the government approval process and it will be advertised shortly.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, so the answer is one, with a view to one-and-a-half?

Mr SELLERS: No, part of one with another half to come.

Ms CARNEY: Three-quarters?

Mr SELLERS: Something like that. At the moment, Keith is undertaking the administrative role and preparing papers in conjunction with other people throughout Minerals and Energy. The intent of the half-time administrative person will be to pick up that coordination role, and there are fractions of people's time across the agency to provide input on the range of issues that were mentioned to the previous answer to the question.

Ms CARNEY: What are the operating expenses of the board and how do they compare to personnel expenses which, I assume, include sitting fees for board meetings?

Mr VATSKALIS: I will take that as a question on notice and I will provide the information.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, could I ask the Leader of the Opposition to restate your question.

Mr SELLERS: Mr Deputy Chairman, sorry, we picked that up in the first question that we have taken on notice, the one about the cost of the board.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that?

Ms CARNEY: No, with respect. I do not know because I would like to see the comparison between running expenses of the board and how they compared to the personnel expenses. The last question was ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will take that as a separate question on notice.

Ms CARNEY: I do not know the answer to that question so, therefore ...

Mr VATSKALIS: We will take it on notice.

Mr SELLERS: We were going to provide you with all that information anyway about how much they cost and ...

Ms CARNEY: Sure, but for the sake of completeness, we will do it separately.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Leader of the Opposition, please you restate your question.

Ms CARNEY: In fact, I will do the whole thing. What are the operating expenses of the Northern Territory Mining Board and the expenses of personnel?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice. I allocate No 8.4 to it.

Ms CARNEY: I do have a number of other questions; however, in the interests of time, I will just ask one more. My colleague would like to ask few questions in relation to another portfolio that the minister holds.

You gave the names of the people on the board and you, basically, told us where they were. Do you have details of their typical qualifications? For your assistance, the reason I ask that question is that I understand - or it has been put to me, I do not put it any higher than that - that there is a lack of expertise in the board at the moment. I say that with no disrespect to those on it. I understand that the board has only two mining engineers, no chemist, no pipeline engineer, etcetera - which I gather are considered desirable?

Mr VATSKALIS: You cannot have a board with a cast of thousands. It is a mining board. It has to provide information to the minister regarding mining issues. I would love to be able to have people who have more than one skill. However, some of the people we have here are very well qualified and very skilled people. Nobody can doubt Chris Salisbury's qualifications, or Brian Hearne's. Dr Ron Matthews is an expert in exploration. We are seeking replacement for three members - Sandra Johnson, Tim Crossley and Doug Parrish who have left. We are looking for a wider and broader level of expertise. I agree with you, I would love to have people with broader expertise.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 2.1.

Output 2.2 - Fisheries

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output 2.2, Fisheries. Are there any questions? There being no questions, that concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any non-output specific budget-related questions?

Ms CARNEY: Yes, on that output, Mr Deputy Chairman. Do you have a media unit in this department?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: Mr Chairman, the answer is yes. It is Marketing and Communications. Do you want me to give you some details, Leader of the Opposition, because I do have them?

Ms CARNEY: I would, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you like to table them?

Mr CARROLL: No, I will just read them out. In our Marketing and Communications unit, we have one Executive Officer 1 who is the director of the unit; three AO7; three AO6; three AO4; and one AO2 vacant. One of the AO6 is located in Alice Springs. We have marketing capacity in Darwin and in Alice Springs.

Ms CARNEY: How many in total?

Mr CARROLL: A total of 11.

Ms CARNEY: Eleven?

Mr CARROLL: Yes. When the former Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development was split to create the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines and the Department of Business Economic and Regional Development, 80% of the staff came from the 'old BIRD', as we refer to it, to DPFIM. The activities they undertake are mostly about promotion of departmental activities, preparation of publications such as this one that was being referred to earlier - the Indigenous Pastoral Program - about promoting what the department is doing for the economic development of the Northern Territory.

Ms CARNEY: How many publications hard copy publications – I am not talking about television advertising or radio advertising - were produced in the last 12 months?

Mr CARROLL: I can take that on notice, but I believe the total is probably in the region of about a dozen. It depends on how you count them. I would count those as publications, whereas fact sheets I would not, because we do a whole lot of things like Agnotes and information sheets that go to a whole range of people that we would not count as publications but just information documents.

Ms CARNEY: Okay.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, will you take that on notice?

Ms CARNEY: No, Mr Deputy Chairman, I do not wish it to be on notice, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Oh, I am sorry. Okay.

Ms CARNEY: You have answered the question. You say about a dozen. In relation to fact sheets and information sheets, what is the difference?

Mr CARROLL: Well, there are things like Agnotes, for example, that are based on scientific information that we put out. Even in that category we have things like what you do with your mangoes. Then we have another set for promotion that we use at the shows where we tell you how to make mango ice cream. There are different categories in those sorts of things, but they vary in all sorts of cases.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. So, publications, just to recap, is this sort of thing – and I think we both know what we are talking about. About a dozen?

Mr CARROLL: That sort of thing. Probably max, yes.

Ms CARNEY: Okay, and the other forms of publication issued by the Marketing and Communications unit include fact sheets, information sheets. My question is: are there any others?

Mr CARROLL: We do advertisements, of course. We have statutory responsibilities for advertising exploration licence applications, for example. In terms of the budget, they take up most of the money. We do discussion papers and things. For example, there is the current discussion paper out on the *Fisheries Act* review.

Ms CARNEY: What is the budgetary allocation to the Marketing and Communications Unit?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: I do have the figures, I just have to find the right spot. In expenditure for corporate marketing information, there is a total of \$523 934. That was broken up between promotions, which was \$21 886; advertising, \$136 048 - and most of that advertising was for statutory type things and things like the call for fishing infrastructure that was talked about a bit earlier; and publications, \$58 695. That should all total \$523 934.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. What is the difference between promotions and publications?

Mr CARROLL: Promotions are things such as the show, events we stage, those sorts of things. These are publications.

Ms CARNEY: How many publications and promotions in the last 12 months have the minister's picture on them?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Carroll?

Mr CARROLL: The latest book *Exploring Country* has the minister's photo in it. The one on the Indigenous Pastoral Program does not. A number of leaflets associated with the show do, but I would have to get you numbers. I do not know off the top of my head.

Ms CARNEY: Okay. I will ask that question on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, do you accept that on notice, minister?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, could I ask you to restate that question?

Ms CARNEY: How many of the publications and promotions produced in the last 12 months bear the photograph of the minister?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate question No 8.5 to it.

Ms CARNEY: In relation to the Marketing and Communications Unit, do any of the staff there type up transcripts of interviews of politicians?

Mr VATSKALIS: Not to my knowledge. Mr Carroll.

Mr CARROLL: I am not aware of us doing that. Occasionally, I see a transcript which comes from the system, but I do not believe it is our staff who type them up.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you. The predictable question in relation to staff which is asked every year in relation to every department - and if you had a table I would be grateful: how many staff are employed in the department and at what level, and can you include full-time equivalents?

Mr CARROLL: I have a table that I can table. I will give you the nice clean copy, rather than one where I have done percentages, unless you were going to ask for percentages, Leader of the Opposition?

Ms CARNEY: No.

Mr CARROLL: It is just a matter of time. I have a table I will table that shows that, at 3 April 2006, there were 494 staff in the department, and it shows each one employed by classification level.

Ms CARNEY: Thank you very much.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there no other questions? As there are no other questions, on behalf of the committee, I thank the officers who provided advice to the Minister for Mines and Energy and the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries. We now move onto the next section.

MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS - DEPARTMENT OF THE CHIEF MINISTER

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Output 4.3 – Multicultural Advancement

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I note from the schedule, minister, that you are now available to take questions on Output 4.3, Multicultural Advancement, which sits within the Department of the Chief Minister. I invite the minister to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if you wish, to make an opening statement. This session will be ceasing at 1.05 pm.

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Deputy Chairman, first of all, thanks to the staff departing from the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, and Mines and Energy. I would like to introduce my colleagues, Jim Laouris, who is the Manager of Multicultural Affairs; Paul Rajan, Director of Community Engagement; and Karl Dyason, Chief Financial Officer, Department of the Chief Minister.

As you are aware, the Office of Multicultural Affairs manages the Northern Territory government's Multicultural Grants program, provides cross-cultural training, provides the Northern Territory Interpreter Translator Service and, in the past year, has been very busy with the development and release of the first annual report of the Multicultural Policy, and with the development and facilitation of the Islamic Youth Forum in both Darwin and Alice Springs. It has been in consultation with members of the rapidly-growing African community as part of the African consultation project, which is nearing completion, and has developed a detailed submission to the Commonwealth government seeking the re-establishment of humanitarian settlement in Alice Springs. They are doing an excellent job, and I thank them very much for their continued support.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions? Member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I would like the member for Macdonnell to stop talking because ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Ask your question. Just get on with it, you have about five minutes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could all members be quiet, please.

Dr LIM: We have very little time left, so I will be quick with this. On page 39 of Budget Paper No 3, there is an indication that you have lost \$100 000 out of your budget for this coming year. That would equate to anything between 20 to 30 organisations that will miss out on community grants. Can you explain that?

Mr VATSKALIS: The \$70 000, decreased from 2005-06 estimates for the 2005-06 budget, results from the \$100 000 transferred off the Ethnic Communities Facilities Development Program creation from 2006-07 into 2007-08, offset by the additional EBA salary increase and further minor deductions. The \$100 000 that was transferred from the Ethnic Communities Facilities Development Program creation from 2006-07 to 2007-08 is not really a deduction; it is reallocation of the money in a different financial year.

Dr LIM: If you look at grants and capital grants paid, your estimate for this year is \$1.24m, ending in a couple of days time and, for next year, you are proposing to have only \$1.14m. That has nothing to do with staffing and outputs, it is about grants and capital grants to organisations.

Mr VATSKALIS: That is what I said. I said the \$100 000 was transferred from the grants from 2006-07 to 2007-08.

Dr LIM: So, that money for this year is now going to be pushed across to next year?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, there was a reduction.

Dr LIM: Why are you pushing money from this year's budget ...

Mr VATSKALIS: Member for Greatorex, you asked me a question, I will give you a response.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, give the minister a chance to answer your question. I will judge if it is not appropriate and I will get it and throw it back to you. You will get a second chance.

Mr VATSKALIS: Paul, would you like to answer?

Mr RAJAN: Paul Rajan, Community Engagement. Member, we have moved \$100 000 from that program into 2007-08 because next year's allocation is the last current budgetary allocation under the current round. The history of that Ethnic Communities Facilities Development Program grants is that many grants are paid over a number of years, and we wanted to ensure that we could maintain the scheduling that the community has come to expect. Actually, all of that grant money will be advertised and allocated next year, but some of it will actually be paid in the following year, if the pattern of allocations is repeated.

Dr LIM: Do you have any printed copies of numbers of consultancies? If you have that, will you table it then for me to formally ask the question for you to then respond?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we will provide you the consultancies.

Dr LIM: For your office, and then for your department?

Mr VATSKALIS: For the Office of Multicultural Affairs consultancy contract, we have had a small number of contracts. Would you like us to table it?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: They did ask for it to be tabled, minister.

Mr VATSKALIS: We can table that, certainly. The total of consultation was \$10 443, and I am happy to table the ...

Dr LIM: Are there any consultancies for your office?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, they are all for the department.

Dr LIM: Last year, you were doing some focus groups. Have you done any focus groups this last 12 months?

Mr VATSKALIS: No, the Office of Multicultural Affairs has not done any focus groups, apart from the consultation with the African consultation project, which was interviews with members of the Darwin African community to ascertain their needs as members of the community.

Mr LAOURIS: Jim Laouris, Manager of Multicultural Affairs. If I might just clarify that? There was a focus group, if you would like to call it that, in relation to the preparation for Islamic Youth Forums that were conducted both in Darwin and Alice Springs. Basically, that consisted of some people from the community, as well as some other stakeholders. We call that a focus group, strictly speaking, that was a focus group for that purpose.

Dr LIM: All right, that is fine. Minister, did you provide any translation services for this year's budget?

Mr VATSKALIS: The department did not provide any translation services for this year's budget.

Dr LIM: I will cut it down because I only have three or four minutes left. Regarding Alice Springs, did you fund the Mabuhay Multicultural Association this year, and to what level?

Mr LAOURIS: From memory, there were two grants. I just need to scroll through my records to find them. There was one grant of \$4950 for the Alice Springs Barrio Fiesta. The actual total was \$8450 of both grants together.

Dr LIM: \$8450 all together for Mabuhay?

Mr LAOURIS: There were two grants.

Dr LIM: Do you continue to provide rental assistance for the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we do.

Dr LIM: To what extent?

Mr VATSKALIS: Through DCIS we continue to provide the assistance.

Dr LIM: Through the DCIS. To what level?

Mr LAOURIS: I do not have those figures with me, but they are easy enough to obtain. I am quite happy to provide those.

Dr LIM: Recently, you were talking about more refugees for the Northern Territory. Have you considered directing any of these to Alice Springs?

Mr VATSKALIS: Well, that decision is not actually ours, it is the Commonwealth's. That is why we are working on a submission for the humanitarian resettlement to Alice Springs.

Dr LIM: You have put in a submission to the federal government to address that?

Mr VATSKALIS: Yes, we have.

Dr LIM: What quantum of refugees would you be considering for Central Australia?

Mr VATSKALIS: We are submitting for three to four families. Again, it is a decision to be taken by the Commonwealth, not for us.

Dr LIM: Compared to Darwin, how many families would be settling in Darwin?

Mr LAOURIS: The current quota under the humanitarian entrance scheme is 200 people, who mainly come from the Horn of Africa, and they have generally come to Darwin. The submission that was made to the Commonwealth in relation to Alice Springs, basically, suggested between three and four families, the idea being that we should begin with a conservative approach to start off with. We made that particular submission in consultation with the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia Inc, who are quite happy with that.

Dr LIM: With regard to the many overseas-trained professionals we are now engaging in the Northern Territory, particularly doctors and nurses in our hospitals, what role does the Office of Multicultural Affairs have with these professionals?

Mr LAOURIS: Under the Multicultural Policy, we have a senior reference group on Multicultural Affairs. One of the actual projects we are looking into, and we have done some consultation with, is in relation to, basically, the needs of skilled migrants as they come into the Northern Territory, particularly those employed by the Northern Territory government. We had done some consultation, specifically at Alice Springs Hospital, and we continue some further work on that.

Dr LIM: Does your department pick up issues of discrimination against overseas-trained professionals? Are you receiving complaints, and what are you doing about it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Laouris.

Mr LAOURIS: We have not received direct complaints of discrimination. Obviously, we would refer those to the Anti-Discrimination Commission to begin with. However, we have heard anecdotal things about discrimination. In those circumstances, we are certainly happy to talk to whoever might have an issue and refer them to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Grotorex, you have one more question.

Dr LIM: In terms of the Office of Multicultural Affairs providing support for people from overseas, are you offering assistance, rather than saying you will be prepared to address the issue if you have a direct

complaint? Are you making yourself available, are you making your presence felt so that people are happy and encouraged to report incidences of this when, in fact, you have heard about it?

Mr VATSKALIS: Mr Laouris.

Mr LAOURIS: Certainly, as far as resources allow, we try to do that. I should point out that the Northern Territory government, through the Multicultural Sponsorship Program, provides some quite significant operational funding to peak multicultural organisations, being the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory and Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia Inc. Part of their role actually should include that type of liaison.

Dr LIM: They do not have the capacity for that sort of role; their role is not in-depth. It is not their role, if they do not have the capacity for that. They are there to support people who are settling, more than trying to pick up anti-discrimination issues.

Mr LAOURIS: Yes, understood, and we do have a good relationship with the two peak multicultural bodies. I can say that advocacy, according to our agreements with them, is definitely part of their role.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We are out of time now. That concludes consideration of this output group. That concludes this session of estimates.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the minister for attending. I also thank the officers of the Department of the Chief Minister for providing advice to the minister today. The next session will reconvene at 1.30 pm.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER SCRYMGOUR'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ENVIRONMENT AND THE ARTS

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will now commence. I welcome the minister and invite her to introduce the officials accompanying her and, if she wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I am joined at the table this afternoon by Mr David Ritchie, Chief Executive of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts. David was appointed Chief Executive on the establishment of this new agency in July last year. I am also joined by Clare Milikins, who is the Executive Director of Finance and governance for the department. I will be joined at the table by other departmental officers as appropriate as we move through the appropriation for this new and innovative department. For Output Group 1.1, Parks and Reserves, I will be joined by the Executive Director of Parks Management, Mr Bill Binns, and I would like to make some brief introductory comments.

The department was created in July 2005 by merging the Conservation and Natural Resources group, including the Parks and Wildlife Service and the Office of Environment and Heritage, from the former Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, and the Arts and Museums Division from the former Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs. The government created this department in recognition of the unique value of the Territory's natural and cultural heritage. The department brings all the natural and cultural values together under the one roof. These are the values that will play an increasingly central role in both the economic development of the Northern Territory and in protecting the unique and wonderful lifestyle that Territorians enjoy.

The department's job is to ensure that these natural and cultural assets of the Northern Territory are protected and that Territorians are given an opportunity to understand their place in history and the natural environment. As outlined in Budget Paper No 3, the department is responsible for conserving, enhancing and ensuring best possible access and enjoyment to the Territory's natural and cultural assets. These assets include our native wildlife and their habitats; renewable natural resources, including water and natural landscapes, many of which form the basis of our parks and reserves system; our creative communities; and buildings and places important in our history, as well the permanent scientific and cultural collections.

The creation of the new department has also led to refinement of the budget outputs to better reflect these objectives. Within the department, there are seven new output groups incorporating 16 new outputs. These outputs replace the three output groups and 11 outputs under the previous administrative arrangements. The result is a significantly improved and informative presentation of the services and deliverables of this new department in the budget. The revised estimates for 2005-06 have been recast in the new output structure to enable comparison between the years. This, the first financial year for the department, has been an exciting one, full of changes and a sharper focus on key outcomes.

The increase in these estimates for last year's budgeted figures reflect the considerable additional grant funding that this department leverages each financial year. In total, \$4.15m in additional grant-funded projects have been added to the output budget since this time last year, with even more currently being received from key funding providers as decisions are made. This level of grant funding cannot be reliably incorporated in forward estimates and, thus, is not reflected in the 2006-07 budget until announced by funding providers. Because grant funding continues to be received right up to the end of the financial year, the department has a significant amount of carryovers, totalling \$8.15m from 2004-05.

The other significant variation between the previous administration arrangement outputs and the new department is the reduction in corporate overhead costs. Overall, the new department is allocating \$3m less in overhead costs against the outputs that transferred under the new Administrative Arrangement Order. Taken together, carry forwards from 2004-05, new grant funding and the decrease in corporate overhead allocations account for 74% of the difference between last year's output budgets and the current 2005-06 estimates.

Mr Deputy Chairman, I will answer questions in regard to policy and operational matters that are within my portfolio. There may be some issues relating to matters that occurred prior to the creation of the new department that are now the responsibility of the previous department. I will provide relevant information where appropriate. In conclusion, 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.

Mr Deputy Chairman, I also have responsibility for the Community Engagement Division of the Department of the Chief Minister, with my responsibilities as Minister for Women's Policy, Young Territorians and Senior Territorians. I intend to make some introductory remarks about those areas when we get to the relevant output groups at the completion of the NRETA outputs.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Not on the opening statement, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – PARKS AND RESERVES **Output 1.1 - Park Joint Management Programs**

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts. I will now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Parks and Reserves, Output 1.1, Park Joint Management Programs. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, minister, I hope you will bear with me. This is the ninth day that I have had this shadow portfolio. I am trying to get as much in there as I possibly can. Regarding Parks and Reserves, I note on page 237 of the budget book, you have already nine Joint Management Programs under way, and you estimate that by next year you will have some 41% of 11 Joint Management Programs. Can you outline for me what they are, where they are, and what parks are involved?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I thank the member for Greatorex for his question. For the nine parks and the operation on how that is done, I will refer that question to the CEO.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the record, before you start, can all witnesses state their name and title for *Hansard* purposes every time they answer a question, and can all members and ministers address all their questions and replies through the Chair.

Dr RITCHIE: David Ritchie, Chief Executive. Dr Lim, as you would be aware, there are 27 parks in the Joint Management Program. Across the Northern Territory, we have programs which relate both to capacity building with indigenous communities on those parks, and with direct employment on various programs within those parks. To get the specific details of what we are hoping to achieve next year, I would

have to take that on notice. We have officers here who could run through some of the successful programs from 2005-06. By way of generality, they are programs such as fairly extensive - what are called - training camps, where the traditional owners are brought in from surrounding areas. They usually set aside a couple of weeks with a range of local rangers and experts from wildlife who come in to teach modules on everything from how to record species in a particular area, fire management and all the hands on, practical, day-to-day park management skills, and the more strategic skills that you need to be a park manager. Although we have some staff behind me who could elaborate, but if ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will ask the member for Greatorex. Would you like that on notice?

Dr LIM: I would prefer that the question be put on notice. We do not have the luxury of time to go through the specifics of each park. What I am looking for, if you would take that on notice, minister?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will ask you to repeat the question then.

Question on Notice

Dr LIM: Minister, could you list the many parks – you said nine in your budget book, and plans for 11 next year, however, you believe you have 27 parks all jointly managed. Could you outline the names of the parks, where they are, what programs are in place? Also, of the 33% to the 41% completion of the program, what those percentages entail?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister has accepted that as a question on notice, and I allocate No 9.1 to it.

Dr LIM: I commend the capacity building amongst rangers in our parks, because the more they know, the better they can manage the parks. I ask you whether, in the Joint Management Programs, there are, indeed, physical infrastructure being placed in those parks as well?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That would be part of the program, member for Greatorex. It would not only be putting the resource out there, but the infrastructure is part of it.

Dr LIM: In the previous response from your CEO, he commented about capacity building in these parks but did not mention anything about infrastructure. There is infrastructure being put out there in buildings, facilities where people can visit, or are we talking about capacity building in skills and training?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In relation to your question, member for Greatorex, the question that my CEO had addressed was in relation to the capacity and the staffing, and you had asked about the nine parks. You did not ask specifically in relation to infrastructure. There is existing infrastructure and, certainly, capital works is part of that rolling program.

Dr LIM: I look forward to receiving the list of parks and all that in response to the question on notice.

Are we talking only about 27 parks – are we talking about more parks than that across the Northern Territory?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will refer that question to my CEO. At the moment it is the 27, but the CEO can talk about that in more detail, member for Greatorex.

Dr RITCHIE: I can also pick up that last question. The Joint Management Program is specifically a program about developing people. The budget for that was specifically identified for developing plans of management and capacity, and leading to traditional owners' involvement in the management of parks. The joint management philosophy is embedded throughout the park service. The recent addition of the 27 joint management parks comes on the back of several existing joint management parks and existing policies and practices. Just for reference, before the 27 parks were added, there was already over 17% of the parks estate being managed jointly with the traditional owners. This program has then taken that up to 58%. In other words, there has been a continuum.

Dr LIM: Minister, do not get me wrong, I commend joint management. I am not criticising, so please do not get on the defensive. What I am curious to know is regarding the funding that you have for parks Joint Management Programs, which is something in the order of \$5m-plus for the coming year. I was curious to

find out whether that was for training costs only, or for infrastructure as well. If it was for infrastructure as well, I see a substantial deficit if you want to build infrastructure out of \$5m.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I would like to state for the record to the member for Greatorex, I am not getting defensive about any of this stuff. When we look at joint management, it did start under the Country Liberal Party, no one is denying that.

Dr Lim: It is a great program.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would like to let you know that I am not being defensive in relation to your questioning. They are valid questions and we will attempt to answer them. In relation to your last question, I will refer it to Mr Bill Binns.

Mr BINNS: Bill Binns, Executive Director, Parks. The \$3m budget that you referred to there has been broken down, in consultation with the land councils and the traditional owners over the year, and split between the three regions. It is split proportionately on the split of the parks in the *Framework for the Future*. As far as Alice Springs goes, that is a 6:4 type split across and the funding has reflected that, and covers a whole range of things which I am quite happy to read out, if you wish?

Dr LIM: Minister, would you be prepared to have that list tabled so that it saves time and we can move on to other topics?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, is it available in a format that can be tabled?

Mr BINNS: It is an internal budget.

Dr RITCHIE: It is a bit cryptic.

Ms CARNEY: We do cryptic!

Mr BINNS: It does have some people's names in there.

Dr LIM: Minister, would you like to modify the document?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, I would like to look at the document and at what names are on that. When they are removed, I would be happy to provide that information to you.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I just clarify to make sure? With that amount that is in there, that that does not include infrastructure costs, member for Greatorex. That would be included on the capital works program.

Dr LIM: I am pursuing the detail because, in the budget book, I cannot get the detail out of it. All I see is that, for the 2005-06 year, you have expended \$4.6m, and in 2006-07, you are planning to spend \$5.1m. In your output group, Parks Joint Management Programs, there is no detail. I am seeking some detail and that is why I am looking for the list.

Moving on. Regarding the parks handover, there was an undertaking that you would provide indigenous land use agreements with these parks. How far have they progressed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Dr Lim, it was a requirement, before any of the titles of the parks would be transferred and the lease back occur, that indigenous land use agreements had to be signed of by the Native Title Tribunal. I understand that has happened to all of them but, if it has not and there is one outstanding or something like that, then it will have to happen before there is any title transfer.

Dr LIM: Again, it is not a trick question, I am just exploring how many. What you are already saying to me is that all the parks have their ILUAs already signed. So all the ILUAs have been signed?

Dr RITCHIE: Yes.

Dr LIM: Are you able to provide the details of each of the ILUAs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Not at the moment, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Dr LIM: Will you take that on notice?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, will you take that on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will not take it on notice. I will attempt to answer the member for Greatorex's question: as I understand it, when the legislation went through and when that was taken through to parliament. However, if you could just hold on a minute, member for Greatorex, I will refer to the CEO.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I remind people present we are going to have a break. It is probably normally about 4 pm. As I am going to be handing over to the regular Chairman, we are going to have that break between 3 pm and 3.30 pm.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I can answer the question the member for Greatorex asked in relation to the ILUAs. As I understand, in February last year, there was a standard framework or format for those ILUAs, which is the indigenous land use agreements for people who do not quite understand the acronyms that we are using. That was tabled in parliament, a standard format, and that is the format that will be used. It is already on record and has been tabled in parliament.

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister. I am aware that it is a standard format. I was looking for details of each ILUA. I have looked on the website of the various parks in question and each of the ILUAs that are listed there contain no detail. It does not explain to me what is proposed to happen within those parks under the agreement, and that is why I am seeking the details of the ILUAs.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you want to take that on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, Mr Deputy Chairman. I will refer that question to the CEO who may be able to go through with a bit more detail in relation to them, member for Greatorex. Yes, we have a standard ILUA, but each one would probably be different or vary.

Dr LIM: It has to be. Each park is different.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, well, you asked the question and I am attempting to provide that information you are asking. I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Dr Lim, the agreement that traditional owners signed required them to sign and to agree to an indigenous land use agreement with a set of fundamental principles in it. There were, basically, three different types of ILUA. One was for land that was to be leased back as scheduled under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, that would become Aboriginal freehold under that act. There was an ILUA designed for land that was to be leased back under Northern Territory title, and an ILUA for parks where joint management was to be implemented without any change of underlying ownership. Apart from the details that you have to put in about the location and extent of the area that we are referring to, the clauses in each of those remain constant, so that what we call the shell ILUAs that have been tabled and are available, will be constant subject to the changes about location and extent and who is actually signing them. There will not be special deals done or reflected other than as necessary to describe the groups and the area involved.

Dr LIM: I appreciate that answer. Thank you very much for that. Your government may be undertaking to hand over the parks based on a couple of legal opinions. Are you able, or prepared, to table the legal opinions that advised government that this was the right course to follow?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, quite clearly, it has been stated before a number of times and I say again to the member for Greatorex, no, that is information that it is provided to government, to Cabinet, and it is not public. This is information for government to be able to make a decision, so, no.

Dr LIM: Well, debating this further, minister, would you consider that giving away such a large expanse of land, based on legal opinions - and you also well know that when you give a brief to 10 lawyers you get 10 different legal opinions - surely, if these legal opinions that the government has are so accurate and so correct, that you would be sharing it with all Territorians?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Clearly, it shows that the CLP has not moved on in one sense, member for Greatorex. I welcome your questions in relation to seeking the information. I am trying to provide that information. This question is almost contradictory to: 'Oh, we support joint management and we think it is a fantastic thing'. The campaign that is being run is that we are just handling land - let us be clear about this - back to blackfellas. That is the code of all of this. Talk to any park rangers - even the decision that our government moved on, which is a fantastic program. There are many productive outcomes and objectives, not only for government but also for indigenous people and all the partners for tourism. The potential has been there and it was something that has been on the drawing board for about 20 years. Nitmiluk is the jewel in the CLP's crown. There was a lot of controversy at that time and the CLP, to their credit, withstood a lot of that.

It smacks of hypocrisy that, on one hand, you say: 'Joint management is fantastic and should be encouraged', and then, on the other hand you say: 'Oh well, you are just handing this over without good legal advice'. Government has every confidence that the advice we received was the best, and that the avenue and the decision that we took was the best and in the interests of the Northern Territory.

Dr LIM: Thank you for your speech, minister. A day will come when somebody in the future will read this *Hansard* and wonder what the heck happened when the minister attacked the member for Greatorex. I asked a simple question. In fact, that simple question was predicated on a very positive Joint Management Program, started by the Country Liberal Party, picked up by the ALP government in the Northern Territory, and it continues to progress.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your question, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: I ask you again: will you provide the legal advice or not?

Mr BURKE: A point of order, Mr Deputy Chairman! The member for Greatorex has asked this question. This is the third time. It is a matter of legal privilege. That is the answer ...

Dr LIM: It is not legal privilege.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on, hang on. Listen to the point of order.

Mr BURKE: The question has been answered. It is a legal opinion.

Dr LIM: A bush lawyer trying to tell me how to do my ...

Mr BURKE: Do not call me a bush lawyer!

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hang on. I uphold that point of order, because I agree, member for Greatorex. I gave you great latitude in asking that question twice. The minister answered appropriately with a 'no' the first time, and you seem not to accept it. I am going to uphold that. Please move on, member for Greatorex. Another question, please.

Mrs Miller: This is court proceedings.

Dr LIM: Yes, court proceedings, that is right. Minister, with regard to the joint park management, can you give me the numbers of people who have been trained so far?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, I will give that question to the CEO or the Executive Director of Parks. Before I pass it over, that has been a positive thing. Recently, in Central Australia, we have seen three graduates through the Joint Management Program, with many more to come. For further detail on that, I will hand across to the Executive Director of Parks, Bill Binns.

Mr BINNS: Within the budget that you referred to before, we have 12 permanent positions which are fully utilised right throughout the year. In a couple of cases, the TOs have decided not to have a permanent ranger in those positions, but to use that money to build capacity within their own groups first and just see how it fleshes out towards permanent employment.

However, outside of those 12 positions, within the full program, we have had numerous ones, if I may just read some off the running sheet. One of the things that immediately comes to mind is that we have had 11 training activities in the southern region. We have had over 200 people involved in the flexible employment program on 71 separate projects across four of the districts in the southern region. We have

had the same flexible employment programs running out of Timber Creek with - I do not have the numbers of participants, but quite a few participants in the 20s or 30s through there. So there is a lot of what, I suppose, would be termed capacity building employment in this program, which then allows us to identify people to come through to those more permanent positions. There is a whole range I could nominate where people have been employed.

Dr LIM: No, you do not need to do that. What I am trying to arrive at in my mind is, with this training that has been provided by the department in capacity building, are we developing people who are going to be professionally trained with Certificate I, II, III and IV in Parks Management. What are we actually doing with this training?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the Executive Director of Parks.

Mr BINNS: That is the whole idea, that we are building that capacity slowly. The 12 permanent positions are certainly working towards those, and one of the first things they do is the Certificate II in Law Enforcement, which we have with Charles Darwin University at the moment. The capacity building, sometimes with some groups, has been fairly basic stuff: what is your responsibility; we are not here with a bucket of money; we are not here to sort out a whole host of other problems; this is what we are here for; this are what your responsibilities are; this is what our responsibilities are; and this is what we can contribute to. Some of the groups that are more organised are more into the governance, what the rules are, how we can build towards committees and boards, and what their responsibilities on those committees and boards will be. However, all the time that we are working, we are looking towards young rangers in those groups that we might be able to develop on who will be managing their own parks in the future.

Dr LIM: In this parks handover - and while we have already had debates about it, and legal opinions on legislation and all that, I just wonder whether it is all clear. It is not clear to me. We have five indigenous members of parliament as well, who, in all this debate - and I know some of the members are, in fact, traditional owners of land as well which are part of the parks handover - has anybody had any personal vested interest in these parks?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I am going to allow margin, I will just see how it pans out.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, if I could ask the member for Greatorex, regarding his question, are you just aiming that at the five indigenous ...

Dr LIM: No, what I am saying is, there are members in parliament here ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you making aspersions here, or are you ...

Dr LIM: I am trying to explain so the minister can answer my question.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I just ask him for some supplementary ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you want to take that question, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Once I can ascertain where the member for Greatorex is coming from, I will.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, I will allow some latitude.

Dr LIM: My question is that there are five indigenous members of parliament in the Northern Territory; that is a fact. Some are traditional owners of land in the Northern Territory. Some of the land involved with the parks handover is in the areas that the five members of parliament who are indigenous people might have traditional ownership interests. If they have traditional ownership interests, I have not heard anyone in parliament declare a personal or vested interest and not be involved in the debate. So, I am asking the question: are there vested interests or ownership interests? If not, that is fine, I accept that; end of story.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You do not have to answer if you do not want to, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, it is a bit hard to answer that question of whether any of the five indigenous members have a vested interest or not in any of the parks regarding traditional ownership interests. It is irrelevant unless the member for Greatorex can stipulate further as to what his line of questioning is.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I believe so too. I question where you are leading to. That is very dangerous ground you are getting on, member for Greatorex. I suggest you move on, because I do not see the relevance of this to this particular forum. Would you like to ask another question?

Dr LIM: Well, Mr Deputy Chairman, it is about the parks and it is about ownership of the parks.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, it is not, the way I read that question. I have allowed you some latitude. You are casting aspersions about ...

Dr LIM: It is what you read in the question.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: ... about potential - you have mentioned the words - conflict of interest ...

Dr LIM: That is right.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: ... and I do not believe that is an appropriate question to ask here. This is an Estimates Committee. You are asking a minister to respond to questions about other members of parliament. I believe that is inappropriate. If you want to ask that, you ask that in parliament proper. Please move on to another line of question. That is a ruling.

Dr LIM: Mr Deputy Chairman, I dissent from that.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You can dissent from that or you can – are you moving dissent?

Dr LIM: I am talking to you, Mr Deputy Chairman. We are talking about land trusts, and we are talking about trusts that have beneficiaries.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You made some assertions.

Dr LIM: The question I was asking of the minister ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, can I just ...

Dr LIM: Let me finish. I am talking to him, minister. The question I was asking the minister, Mr Deputy Chairman, was: are any of the members beneficiaries of the land trust? That is all I am asking.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, you did not. You made some other assertions of conflict of interest. I ruled that question out of line. If you want to dissent from that ruling, you may well do so, otherwise move on. Are you moving a motion of dissent?

Dr LIM: No, I do not want to dissent because there is no point in that ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Next question, please.

Dr LIM: ... because if I ask a question, you will just rule it out of order anyway.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Next question, please.

Dr LIM: Well, I will hold for now.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, are there any other questions on this Output 1.1?

Mr WOOD: Mr Deputy Chairman, my question regards management plans. How far advanced are management plans for some of the new arrangements for the parks coming on?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: To answer and provide the details to the member for Nelson on the management plans and where they are at, I refer that question to the Executive Director of Parks, Mr Bill Binns.

Mr BINNS: At the moment, we are working on statements of management intent with the various groups, because we realise that a plan of management, in some cases, especially where there are several clan groups involved, is going to take some time to do. However, we have two at draft stage, which are the Devils Marbles and the Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve. Traditional owners for both have worked with us and we have them at draft stage.

Mr WOOD: Has your government developed any new parks since it came into office? Is there any intention to create new parks in the near future?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In relation to the member for Nelson's question, I refer this to the Chief Executive Officer. He passed me a piece of paper and I cannot understand his writing; that is being totally honest in not being able to understand his scribble. I will refer that question to my Chief Executive Officer.

Dr RITCHIE: I warned all our staff not to write handwritten notes to her, and here we are. There are a few new parks. There are the new areas of land that came into the parks and stayed as a result of the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*. They are the connecting areas between the two hitherto discrete bits of Gregory, and Gregory's Tree. The one that we are working on at the moment with infrastructure is the Channel Point Conservation Reserve, which is approximately 250 ha, and that is primarily for a coastal camping and fishing experience.

Mr WOOD: What would be required to convince government to look at - and I refer to the land at Silkwood that is being subdivided at the moment - taking over that land, if I can put it that way, and putting it into a national park estate? What would people need to do to convince you that that patch should be a park?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I know the member for Nelson raised this question in parliament last week to my colleague, the minister for Lands in relation to this and had a brief discussion. For the process of what happens with that, I refer that question to the CEO of the department.

Dr RITCHIE: As a parks agency, we have prepared a fairly comprehensive document - of which you would be aware of several of the earlier drafts - of the Parks and Conservation Master Plan. That gives a very rational basis for including new areas within the parks estate, both within the terms of their biodiversity value and their potential recreational and tourist value. There is a sliding scale and that enables parliament to make those choices. The Parks and Conservation Master Plan is currently being considered by government. It will form the basis of those kinds of decisions in the future.

Mr WOOD: Through you, Mr Deputy Chairman, whilst I understand there is a master plan, there must be times when the master plan is not the only basis on which government has to make decisions. In the case of the Silkwood area - and the area is well known for its flat top mountains and mesas - does the government give any consideration to landscape features which highlight, I suppose, some of the beauty of the Territory. It might go outside biodiversity and certain heritage guidelines, but it is something that represents and is unique to the Territory. Are any of those types of features at all regarded as worth conserving in the Territory in a park form?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that to the CEO, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Dr RITCHIE: As I was saying before, the Parks and Conservation Master Plan looks at things from a number of angles. One of the angles is its potential recreational and tourist potential. Clearly, some of the great landscapes of the Northern Territory are within that. However, in fairness, we are not considering that area as a potential park at the moment.

Mr WOOD: I have one more question on that. When land is being moved from leasehold to, say, freehold, as was the case with Mt Bundy some years ago I believe, will your department be part of the process which assesses whether all that land could be freehold, and decisions made at an earlier stage to see if it should be conserved?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, if I could ask: what areas are you talking about, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: In the case of Mt Bundy, which would have been a pastoral lease at some stage, it was then subdivided and made freehold. The problem is that, once it became freehold, it was very difficult to remove areas. Unfortunately, one area which was not removed - although I think Parks might have been given the option - was Robin Falls. There are areas there where the escarpment runs along Dorat Road where there was consideration for that being in the Waruwi catchment or the Litchfield National Park. Once it is freehold, there is very little you can do with it unless you want to pay compensation to the owner.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I wonder whether the question is relevant to Lands; however, I will refer that to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: That area is not under consideration at the moment to be included within the parks estate. We have not received any representations from any of the owners or, in fact, any of the tourism industry for including it in the parks estate. If there was such, then it would be considered. As I said, the Parks and Conservation Master Plan does provide a very rational, clear way of assessing the merits of proposals like that.

Mr WOOD: I can say on that issue there has been some lobbying. Hopefully, it will come through Parks. That is all my questions on that section.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions on that section?

Dr LIM: I may need guidance here, Mr Deputy Chairman. I am not sure whether this is the right place to ask the question. The government's announcement that the West MacDonnell National Park is going to be converted into world heritage listing - is that part of this output group? What is the progress on this?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I thank the member for Greatorex for his question. I will refer that to David Ritchie, the CEO, just to go through where we are with that.

Dr RITCHIE: Dr Lim, as you are probably aware, the process for world heritage listing is a fairly long one. The first hurdle we have to get over is to have the area listed nationally. The work that we have done so far has focused on the natural values of that area, which are quite considerable. The West MacDonnell Ranges are, as we would say, a biological hot spot. However, the advice from the Commonwealth and those who have to deal with the World Heritage Committee, is that it is unlikely that we would get a world heritage listing on the basis of natural values alone, and that we have to make out a parallel case of the cultural values of which, again, there are many. We are confident that we can do it.

As we speak, we have started the exhaustive task of going through the cultural values of the West MacDonnell Ranges. I would be happy to give a briefing on the various themes in that. Just for sake of argument, there is everything from the traditional significance, the Strehlow collection, the ranges as the source of inspiration for the Arrernte water colour tradition, the ranges as the source of inspiration for the world's understanding, etcetera.

Dr LIM: I will come for a briefing. That is all, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Are there any other questions? On that note, I conclude consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Parks And Reserves Management Programs

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.2, Parks and Reserves Management Program. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, this output group – you can guide me if I am wrong - is about managing our reserves and parks, such as East Point Reserve and all these listed as well. Can you give any progress report on what happened to the wallabies at East Point?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is about some of the reserves. In answer to the member for Greatorex's question, as I understand it, the East Point Reserve is actually under the operation of Darwin City Council.

Dr LIM: Darwin City Council? Okay. I wonder whether you are aware that Wildcare is hosting a national conference in Darwin in August this year. Have you assisted Wildcare at all, in any way, to put this conference on?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, there is a meeting planned for me to meet with that group but, as yet, I have not had any discussions with them.

Dr LIM: The conference, for your information, is in August, which is only a few weeks away. I hope you will support them. I understand that, up to this point in time, there has been no support so far. What assistance do you provide Wildcare in the Northern Territory, in terms of this budget Parks and Reserves Management Program.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to take that question, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, regarding question and the funding for that group, if you could refer it and leave it until under the Natural Resource output, for cane toads, feral animals and regulations.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Which output number is that, minister? I will make a note of it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have the actual book and the numbers for it. It would be good if he could leave that for there, then we could go through some of the grant funding.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No 3.2, I believe. I will refer that question down the line to Output 3.2. Member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: All right, I will leave it at that then. That is all I will ask the minister at this stage.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Minister, your department owns the Buffalo Creek boat ramp. In December 2004, you put out expressions of interest for someone to run the security car park and kiosk. As you might know, there is still no kiosk there. As you also might know, the department built a security car park on Defence land. Minister, how did this happen in the first place, and when can we expect the owner of the land, who has provided a service there without being able to open up the kiosk, expect to get compensation?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to the member for Nelson's question, that issue has certainly been a long saga. From our point of view and from the Medicotts, who were involved with that, we had worked towards resolution for the best between Parks and the Medicotts.. In relation to compensation, we recognised the work that was done with the Medicotts to resolve this issue. As I understand it, at that point when it was resolved - from my discussions with the CEO regarding both parties - the Medicotts felt that they had suffered loss. We did have a look at it and I asked the CEO for the department to go back. If I could bring forward Dave West, who was the officer in charge of those negotiations with the Medicotts through this whole process, he would probably be in a better position to answer.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr West, please come forward, and for the purpose of *Hansard*, please state your title and name.

Mr WEST: David West, Director, Regional Parks North. Whilst the issue of compensation has been raised, there is an understanding between the parties that the aim is to get the operation up and running in relation to the kiosk. The security service for fishermen has proven very successful to date. The arrangement between the parties is that we focus on getting the kiosk up and running. That has been a collaborative approach from everyone involved.

We currently have works being undertaken at the moment with the kiosk and we are hoping that that will be in operation in the very near future. The government has committed a fair bit of assistance and funds to that in resolving these issues. Obviously, that would be part of the consideration at the end of the day as to the satisfaction of all the parties being involved in this matter.

Mr WOOD: A part of that question was: how was it that the department built a security car park on someone else's land?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I do not have those details with me, member for Nelson, but I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: That area you are referring to is subject to a management agreement between the Department of Defence and the Parks and Wildlife Service. We decided to proceed with the construction of that facility because we were assured, at an officer level, that the rest of the paperwork would follow rapidly. That did not occur and, so, we found ourselves in this position. However, it was on the basis of a management agreement that we had been carrying out for many years there.

Mr WOOD: Is it not the case that, under planning laws, only the owner of the land could apply for the development? The owner of the land was Defence, and Defence had not given approval for this development?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer to my CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, that is correct.

Mr WOOD: Is it not the case that Ray Medicott, who won the contract - if you could call it that - did so on the basis that not only would they provide a secure car park for fishers, but they would also generate income from having a kiosk? We just heard today that the kiosk is starting to be built. The Medicotts have been there since probably early 2005 and have not received any income from the kiosk because they could not build one. They still have not received compensation. Would you guarantee, minister, that these people receive, at the earliest possible date, compensation for what they have actually had no control over but was caused by a poor decision in the department?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Member for Nelson, all that you have said is correct, except that, understand that the Medicotts are actually receiving a payment from the service for carrying out their services on that site. As Mr West indicated, if there is a question of compensation that comes out at the end of this, then we will certainly be considering it. At this stage, that is not an issue on the table. At the moment, we have very good relations with the Medicotts; they are providing a very good service. I believe all parties understand that we acted in good faith, that we got caught up in the paperwork between the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth, and that that is now being ironed out.

Mr WOOD: I understand that, and I am not trying to put a wedge between the department and the Medicotts. However, I knew of this issue a long time ago. I have actually held off raising it, even in parliament, because I knew there were negotiations over compensation. I rang today to find out that compensation has still not been paid; it has been extremely slow in coming forth. The reason I am raising it here today is that I believe that is just inappropriate that someone has to wait this long to be compensated for something that really was the fault of the department.

I ask the minister whether she please look at this and, if she can have some input into speeding up this compensation, would she do so?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to take that question?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Look, I have nothing further to add to that, Mr Deputy Chairman.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, there is. The management at Tree Point concerns me, minister. It is one of those parks that does not have formal car parking or an office, but it is under extreme pressure from large numbers of people who are now visiting that area. One of the major problems is people driving over the sand dunes. What plans does the government have to protect that area from damage by weekenders, four-wheel drives and inappropriate camping?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, in answer to the member for Nelson's question, I will ask Mr Dave West, whose area that comes under in regard to the discussions with residents in other areas regarding Tree Point.

Mr WEST: From a management point of view, that is part of Darwin District Parks operation. We put considerable effort into regular patrolling at those times when we know that it is fairly popular, particularly at weekends. We have also worked with the landowners there in having appropriate signage to advise people of where they can and cannot drive within the Tree Point area. We have a collaborative approach there with the local people as well as the rangers working with the visitors and the public in using that facility. Often, it is a difficult situation enforcing that when it occurs at all sorts of hours and all sorts of times. However, we have a fairly good ongoing arrangement and it has worked fairly successfully to date.

Mr WOOD: With regard to cleaning up of Howard Springs Reserve, which I am grateful for - although I do not want to see a sign up in September saying it is all closed; we will have to wait and see - could you give us an idea of the cost of the work that was required to reopen the Howard Springs Reserve for swimming?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, member for Nelson, if you would like, I could take that question on notice.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you prefer that, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: Yes, I can do that.

Question on Notice

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For the purpose of *Hansard*, could I ask the member for Nelson to restate your question?

Mr WOOD: Minister, could you please give us the cost of works associated with the cleaning up of the Howard Springs Reserve so that it could be reopened for swimming?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I acknowledge that the minister accepted that as a question on notice and I allocate No 9.2 to it. Member for Nelson, do you have any further questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, could you please explain what the reasons were for the closure of Berry Springs so late into the Dry Season?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, before I refer this question, my office had one phone call from an operator in Berry Springs. The reason for that closure - and I will get my directors to answer that in more detail - we had record rainfall and, as well as the interest of public safety with the rainfall, there is the issue of crocodiles. I will refer that to Mr Binns.

Mr BINNS: I cannot really add any more than the minister; she knows my job better than I do. What she said is true - late Wet Season, etcetera. As you know, the parks have emergency response procedures for each park. One of them at Berry Springs, of course, is about the safety of the water. The water level remained high and, so, for safety with the speed of the water, that was the first aspect. Once that water slows down and it is not turbulent any more and it is clear enough to see, we still have the crocodile problem, because the weir overflows each year, which goes directly down Berry Creek into Darwin Harbour. Then we have to do the crocodile clearance, which usually takes three clear runs. In between time, there is the water test for the turbidity of the water, but that was clear before the crocodiles appeared this year.

Mr WOOD: The last question. Minister, would it be possible to get visitor numbers for all parks over the last three years? Associated with that question: why is it not possible to show the total number of visitors to all the parks - that is, as one lump sum - similar to what you do under your category Biological Parks, where there is a total of visitors.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have some – sorry?

Dr LIM: Are we doing parks? We are onto Output 1.2, are we?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I believe he is just asking.

Mr WOOD: I was just referring to how it is done in one category, but not in another.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, if you wanted to, I could table for you this document, which outlines all of our parks and reserves and visitor numbers up to 2005.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I would be happy with that.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It does not include any of the smaller parks, but some of the major parks, like Gregory, Keep River, Limmen, the Casuarina Coastal Reserve, Charles Darwin National Park, Alice Springs Telegraph Station. There are none of the smaller ones but, certainly, some of the bigger parks.

Mr WOOD: Would it be possible to get the other ones? I had a table previously which was not about actual visitor numbers, I think it was about the number of cars.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just a minute. Mr Secretary, can I ask that the member for Nelson have a quick look at that and see whether that is right before we go on?

Mr WOOD: I am looking at all the parks, including places like Davenport Range or those type of smaller places.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will give you a moment to have a look at that, member for Nelson.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, from the CEO, there is a total of about 83 - is it 83 parks we are talking about?

A witness: Ninety-one.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Ninety-one parks.

Mr WOOD: We have to know where to go during the Dry Season.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Would you like that ...

Mr WOOD: I am happy with that one; however, I might just ask the question to make sure I have all the information. Of those 91 parks, do you keep figures for visitors? I notice here you do not have Flora River, which is an important national park. If it is possible to get figures for all those national parks, I would appreciate it.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, do you want to take that as a question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, to answer the member for Nelson's question, I will refer that to Bill Binns, the Executive Director.

Mr BINNS: No, we do not collect continuous figures at all parks. A lot of the smaller parks are done on a visitor survey number, and we try and extrapolate that out to give us a better idea throughout the year. A lot of places like Flora, as you would understand, are inaccessible for maybe six months or so of the year; there is a fairly confined season. We do not collect at all the places but, if you are interested in anything specific, we do have survey results from other parks as well. We use that group as the indicator parks for the visitation.

Mr WOOD: The reason I asked the question was because the figures I had for the previous year showed most parks were down on numbers. I was concerned about that because, I must admit, I think our parks are terrific. I have been to Flora River Nature Park and it is has a great camping ground; it is a great place. I would be concerned if there was a trend downwards for visitor numbers to some of our parks. That is really where I was coming from.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is that a question?

Mr WOOD: No, it is a comment.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions?

Mr WOOD: No.

Dr LIM: Just one, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, are you responsible for the Doctor's Gully Aquatic Life Reserve?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: That is fine, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Any other questions? There being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Regulation and Enforcement for Conservation

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 1.3, Regulation and Enforcement for Conservation. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Just a quick one, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, I understand that there are permits now required to enter parks in Central Australia. Is that right?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, no.

Dr LIM: No? I have been approached by several tourism operators in Alice Springs who say that, as of 1 April this year, they have been receiving permits which they must carry if they wish to enter Territory parks. While it is at no cost at the moment, there is an expectation that, in due course, those permits will be issued at a cost.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: For a minute, I got a bit confused where the member for Greatorex was coming from in terms of tour operators. That system was put in place, and we made an announcement about that. That was with full support of the tourism operators and the associations representing them. It had to do with accreditation and other areas. I will refer this question to the Executive Director, Mr Bill Binns.

Mr BINNS: The Tour Operator Permit system is in place at the moment. There are about 94 registered operators. We have only had one complaint, but it was done through industry, on the committee. Industry, in fact, have pushed the department to take bigger steps than, perhaps, we were prepared to take. The second stage is an accreditation stage, which we are doing with Kakadu and Uluru, which is an online accreditation for tour guides to more professionalise the tour guides. The third stage is going to be the accreditation of the companies. The companies have now actually asked to push forward their accreditation, because they feel they are part way there with some of their accounting accreditation and that sort of thing. We hope by this time next year to have all three stages in place.

Dr LIM: Do you mean that every tourism operator who goes into Territory parks must be an accredited tourism tour guide? Am I right in saying that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will refer this question to the Executive Director of Parks.

Mr BINNS: Every company that operates a business on a park needs to have a permit to operate commercially on the park. In some cases, for example, with the bigger companies, that may be 20 bus stickers or car stickers and, in some, it is just a sole operator who has one sticker. At the moment, the permits have not cost anything. The industry has agreed that they would see in the future that some costs would be incurred, mainly around administrative costs.

Dr LIM: The permit is for the tour operator, to be affixed to the vehicle - am I correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, member for Greatorex, that is correct.

Dr LIM: Does the tour operator need to be accredited in any way to receive that permit?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer the member for Greatorex's question to the Executive Director, Parks.

Mr BINNS: The permit is issued to the operator. From memory, there are only two conditions that they need to meet: they need to have an emergency response risk management plan for the company and for their tourists, and they need to have first aid qualifications. They are the only requirements that they are to have at the moment.

Stage 2 is about the actual guide, and the guide having accreditation, so that they tell the right story and they go about it professionally. Stage 3 is about the company, again, meeting other accreditation to qualify into that. The industry sees this as a positive, because they can use it in their advertising that they are accredited on the park, so they are wanting to push it. The accreditation of the companies will be, again, along the emergency response procedures, accounting accreditation, their visitor management programs that they have and the training for their staff.

Dr LIM: Do not get me wrong, I am not debating the merits or otherwise. What I am trying to find out is the cost of accreditation, and the length of time that is required for them to do the training to become accredited tour operators?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, there was a 12-month exemption to begin with, and the industry actually saw this as a real positive, that we provided that exemption from any cost, across the board, but that would be phased in from 1 April 2007. The cost has not been agreed to, but that would be phased in from next year, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Has the department worked out the anticipated cost per operator to get themselves trained and become accredited; otherwise, we are not going to be able to operate until 1 April 2007?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, I will refer that question to Mr Bill Binns.

Mr BINNS: The operators have never raised the issue of any cost. I believe they see it as a normal business cost that they would be prepared to wear. A lot of the associations, like Savannah Guides and those they are members of, we will accept that as accreditation for those things that they cover. They have already sought and received them. As far as the guides are concerned, CDU, along with Parks Australia North, the managers of Kakadu and Uluru, and ourselves, are working on an online accreditation so the tour guides, over a season, can do their accreditation online through that. I presume in that there will be HECS fees or whatever they are called, so there will be some cost. However, it is not an issue that they have raised with me. They are in the majority on the committee and they have never raised that as an issue for their companies.

Dr LIM: Minister, there are many tour operators that have come from interstate who, in fact, originate from interstate and source their clients from interstate, and bring them through in small one-man operations into the Northern Territory to access Territory parks. In fact, their destination tends to be Territory parks, but they originate from capital cities of Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne or wherever, trekking through remote Central Australia when they come to the Territory. How do you anticipate that these tour operators will be accredited and provided with permits to enter Territory parks?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, in answer to the member for Greatorex's question, I remember at the time when we made the announcement - and certainly the work that the department has done with the industry was seen as very favourable. If you are talking about interstate operators who are coming from other areas, well, they have come from other areas where there are regulatory regimes in place and these sort of processes are already in place in other areas. Certainly, we should not lag behind the rest of Australia. It is the only responsible thing for us to do. We only have to look at places like Kakadu and some of our other parks, where we have had incidences. I believe it has not been before time that we have not, and there is a real need to bring in this sort of accreditation, which I am sure you agree with, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Minister, I believe all professional people should have some level of training to be professional, to do the right thing in their job. However, when you concede that tour operators from interstate would have already their own jurisdictional accreditation, I hear from your chief executive, or your executives, that the intention is to ensure that tour operators provide the right stories, the right experiences in the Territory. If these accredited tour operators from interstate who have not done their training in the Territory, come to the Territory and tell stories that they dream up from somewhere, how are you going to provide a genuine tour experience to clients who come to the Territory and walk away with an experience that is devoid of genuine Territory experience?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you wish to take that question?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can you just hold a minute, please?

After a quick discussion regarding the member for Greatorex's question, a lot of interstate tour operators have no complaints, or have not complained. They have to comply when they go to Kakadu or Uluru. Member for Greatorex, I have nothing further to add, other than to say that they go to Uluru and Kakadu now and they have to comply.

Dr LIM: Whether the minister gets complaints or not, I am saying that you do not introduce a system that you cannot enforce and implement across the board. It creates a two-tier system: you have a Territory system that imposes stringent standards on Territory tour operators, whereas interstate operators, who could just take tourists across the border, do not have to comply and will provide different levels of experience - genuine and otherwise - to international or interstate tourists who come to the Territory for that experience. Obviously, the policy has not been thought through properly. I put to the minister that maybe she needs to reconsider this to ensure that all tour operators who come to the Territory observe the same standard. She may want to defer this implementation to beyond 1 April - unfortunate date - April Fools Day - 2007.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Deputy Chairman, for the member for Greatorex to say that is flawed and we should defer that - this process has already been in place for some time. It was at the urging of the industry and working with the industry with their full encouragement and support to make this happen. For the

member for Greatorex to say that it is flawed or that we should defer it, well, member for Greatorex, it has been in for some time and we have been working with the industry to look at and, as we go along, pick up issues that you have talked about. There has been very little complaint; it has actually been a system that has been welcomed by the industry.

Dr LIM: No further questions.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there any other questions? On that basis, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0, Parks and Reserves.

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

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The committee will now proceed with Output Group 2.0, Biological Parks, Output 2.1, Visitor and Education Facilities. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, in this output group, you are talking about the two Territory Parks - the Territory Wildlife Park and the Alice Springs Desert Park - am I right?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, member for Greatorex, in this output I am talking about the George Brown Botanical Gardens and Olive Pink Botanical Gardens. For further clarification, member for Greatorex, I will refer to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Dr Lim, this is the bit of NRETA that holds the Community Service Obligation funding that goes to the GBD, which comprises the Wildlife Park and Desert Park. You will see the CSO in this output and, in addition to that, you will see the Botanic Gardens and Windows on the Wetlands.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Greatorex, do you have any further questions relating to this output?

Dr LIM: Well, I am trying to find my way around the output lists, Mr Deputy Chairman. Where do the two Territory Wildlife Parks come into the output groups here?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Are you looking for the financial ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could you be more specific?

Dr LIM: I have questions relating to Territory parks. Where do you go to in this list?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, it would be right at the end. We are trying to get the answer for you, member for Greatorex ...

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: If you have any other questions in regard to ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I understand, member for Greatorex, it is right at the end output. I will refer this question to Clare Milikins, who is the Chief Financial Officer and she can just go through and clarify some of those outputs for the member for Greatorex.

Ms MILIKINS: Clare Milikins, Executive Director, Finance and Governance. The GBD is actually listed separately at the end of the output list that we will be considering today. If you go right to the end of those output points, the GBD is right at the end, completely separate from the agency. This output deals solely with the Community Service Obligation that is paid to the GBD for its non-commercial operational aspects.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, have you any questions?

Dr LIM: No, thank you, that is fine.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions relating to Output 2.1, Visitor and Education Facilities, for those who have just entered?

Mr WOOD: No.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, there being no other questions, that concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Botanic Gardens

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Botanic Gardens. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, you mentioned earlier that the two Botanic Gardens that you have responsibility for are the George Brown Botanical Gardens in Darwin and the Olive Pink Botanical Gardens in Alice Springs. Could you break up the allocation so that we have the details of what amount is provided to which park, please?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer this question to Jim Grant.

Mr GRANT: Jim Grant, Director, Bio Parks. We have just taken responsibility for administrative arrangements for Olive Pink Botanic Gardens. I believe that went through Cabinet quite recently. Therefore, those figures will not appear until this coming financial year. Olive Pink Botanic Gardens gets \$126 000 per year towards its upkeep ...

Dr LIM: Six hundred and ...

Mr GRANT: \$126 000 per year. That is exactly the same as they were getting from the Department of Local Government.

Dr LIM: That is all I have, thank you.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions relating to Output 2.2? Okay, there being no other questions relating to Output 2.2, that concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NATURAL RESOURCES

Output 3.1 – Natural Resource Assessment

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Natural Resources, Output 3.1, Natural Resource Assessment. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Through you, Mr Deputy Chairman. Minister, how many reviews have been undertaken by this department in 2005-06 and what are they?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If you hold on, I will get the list for you, member for Katherine. I will not be a moment.

Mrs MILLER: While you are having a look, are they reviews that have been completed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If you hold on, I will get the list for you. Mr Deputy Chairman, if I could refer to the member for Katherine's question with reviews - for right across the agency?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Not just for Natural Resources?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Okay. For Arts NT, there was the review of the indigenous art strategy, Building Strong Arts Business. The current status of that is that it is with me at the moment to get approval for the public release of the review report, summary and recommendations. With that signing off, that will need to go to Cabinet, obviously, with that implementation plan for the Building Strong Arts Business under development for consideration. That will go to Cabinet around August 2006.

For Environment and Heritage, there is the review of the heritage legislation. The current status is that that is also about to go to Cabinet, waiting for approval for the release of the Exposure Bill. One of the commitments that we gave was that we would draft an Exposure Bill that would go back out quickly to the community and then it would be tabled.

In regard to the statutory review of the *National Environment Protection Council (Northern Territory) Act*, the current status of that is it will be undertaken as part of the review of this suite of multi-jurisdictional legislation, and that will be commencing in mid-2006 under the auspices of the Environment Protection and Heritage Ministerial Council.

The statutory report on Waste Management and the *Pollution Control Act* is completed and posted on the Environment and Heritage website.

The current status of the Litter Abatement and Resource Recovery Strategy is that work has commenced, and we are just pending any legislative changes proposed by the interim EPA Board.

In terms of natural resource management regulation and enforcement, the review of the *Pastoral Land Act* is about 75% complete. I have actually just sent that out to go back to some of the stakeholders who participated in the review.

The current status of the revision of Divisions 4, 5 and 6 of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*, is that it is coming back to Cabinet for approval to submit to Parliamentary Counsel. That is the total on the reviews.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, minister. Is there a cost for those reviews?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not think so, because they are done internally by the department.

Mrs MILLER: Right. How many staff do you have in the department and at what classification are they?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I seek some clarification from the Chair? With this output, are you just wanting staff that are within this area of the agency, or right across the agency?

Mrs MILLER: Right across the agency.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Can I just seek ...?

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You certainly can. Do you want to seek clarification?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Whether it is National Resource Management. As I understand it, this area is only part of the agency and we would need to look at the overall total. Rather than me trying to read through these, about 742, for actual and full-time equivalents, I will refer that question to the CEO of the department, who can go through some of those staff.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you happy with that?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, through the Chair ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Did you want an answer to that question?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I thought you were going to table them.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I did not say I was going to table it, what I said was that I will refer the answer to your question to the CEO of the department. I did not say that I would table my notes.

Mr DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The CEO is going to refer to some but not all, as I understand.

Dr RITCHIE: The question that I understood you asked was for staff for the whole agency initially, which is - and I have to give you this in full-time equivalent. There are more people than this, but this is the full-time equivalent. It is 742 now; it was 769 on the transfer at the time that the department was set up.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you for that. Minister, how do you communicate with all of those departments? Do you have a communications unit that covers that whole area?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Internally in the department? Yes, the department has a communications unit, member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: And how many people are in that communications unit?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In Marketing and Communications, five; media two; and then the web manager, two. In total, nine.

Mrs MILLER: What do those media people do? What is their role?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In the media section, which has two people, one is a media liaison person and the other one is a communications officer. The media section is responsible for proactively releasing information from the department relating to its operations, while also responding to queries from journalists on a local, national and international level. This includes a vast range of topics from crocodile relocations, which a lot of them love, to public comment on plans of management, as well as gallery and exhibition openings. They also release approximately four media releases a week, while reacting to 12 individual topics per week. It subscribes to media monitoring services to local company media networks. It monitors any events and news relating to the department within the Northern Territory. The media unit also works with my office, providing information for ministerial announcements as requested.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, minister. What is the budget of your media unit?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will have to refer that question to the Chief Financial Officer of the department, Clare Milikins.

Ms MILIKINS: We do not actually have at hand a detailed breakdown of our corporate support by division. I have the total budget for corporate support for the agency, which is \$17.2m in 2005-06, and \$16.9m in 2006-07.

Mr MILLS: Is that just for communications?

Ms MILIKINS: No, that is for the whole of corporate support for the agency.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We do not have it broken down exactly for media and ...

Ms MILIKINS: No, we do not have it broken down.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Clare did state, member for Blain, that it was for across the agency not within just media and marketing.

Mr MILLS: I am not doubting it; I did not hear her properly. It is for verification.

Ms MILIKINS: We do have the total market expenditure to date for 2005-06 if that would be of assistance.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please.

Ms MILIKINS: The total market expenditure to date for this financial year is \$474 000. That includes all staff.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, how many indigenous partnerships do you involve in the Natural Resources estimate?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Could you be a bit more - I am not sure what you are ...

Mrs MILLER: Across your agency, how many indigenous partnerships do you have.?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Partnerships as in what, member for Katherine? I am sorry, I am not trying to be facetious. I am just trying to work out what your question is in terms of partnerships.

Mrs MILLER: With your indigenous communities.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: One minute, we are talking about personnel. Are you talking about partnerships ...

Mrs MILLER: Sorry, I have chopped out a few questions here because I am going to run short of time so I have to get my sequence going myself. I wanted to know how many indigenous partnerships across your agency you have? Do you have any in Natural Resources?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: As you can image, a lot of our work involves close collaboration and arrangements with the traditional owners and their representative organisations. I cannot give you a number for each of those relationships on any particular area. We have formal arrangements with the indigenous land corporation for funding weed programs, for instance. We can speak more on those. We have relationships with the land councils to deliver joint management.

Mrs MILLER: That is the type of thing I am referring to.

Dr RITCHIE: By and large, those are overarching arrangements and, then, there are delivery of a specific program. The majority of natural resource management programs have an indigenous component and some level of involvement of indigenous landowners.

Mrs MILLER: That is all on that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No further questions? Are there any other questions?

Dr LIM: We are on 3.2, are we, or 3.1?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Output 3.1 still, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Again, I come back to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment please, member for Greatorex. Member for Nelson, do you have a question?

Mr WOOD: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, there was a program that the government was going to run in collaboration with the Commonwealth government to do with assessing the groundwater in the rural area of Darwin. There was some money allocated by the Commonwealth for that program. You advised me in parliament that that money was now going to go to a Daly River water management program, I believe, or water assessment program. What has happened to the concept of measuring the amount of water being used in the Darwin rural area?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, I remember you asking me that question. I said at that time, responding to your question, regarding Litchfield – all that area was included – that the understanding I had from the department was that it was not going to be part of that program. As I understand, because of the requirement from the Commonwealth - and last week I went to the water ministers meeting - that would be brought back on. I will refer that to the CEO who will clarify that a bit more.

Dr RITCHIE: The funding we have under the National Water Initiative, the national water fund, includes a determination of the appropriate sorts of meters for installation, both in the Darwin region and the Daly. What we have to do is finalise our approach to this, because just having the meters is one thing, but actually having somebody to engage with the residents of that area and determine who wants to volunteer and how it would be organised is yet to be arranged. It looks like we will be able to do at least something this coming season. We will be conducting discussions with the local water users to see who is putting their hand up for a meter.

Mr WOOD: That means the entire world .

Dr RITCHIE: I am not so sure about that.

Mr WOOD: Through you, Mr Chairman, we did have that meeting last year regarding water metering, and it was made clear to a lot of people there is a lot of difference between a Power and Water meter, and a meter that would be put on a bore for conservation reasons. I must admit, I was surprised about the number of people who put their hand up and said they would volunteer to have a meter. I hope I have it right; that it is that the program will go ahead, it is just a matter of working out some of the practicalities. If you are worried about how you would collect the figures on the amount of water being pumped, could I

suggest that those people who have volunteered I am sure would be willing to also ring through the amount, because I believe that is a significant change in attitude in the rural area.

A member interjecting.

Mr WOOD: I know, yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No, no, I am sure they will thank you for that suggestion.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, we were just going to say thank you to the member for Nelson. I believe that it was a good suggestion.

Mr CHAIRMAN: He has been known to be constructive, minister. Member for Greatorrex?

Dr LIM: We are talking about natural resources assessment. Earlier, I asked for guidance as to where I go in regard to wildlife. Am I in the right section, Mr Chairman?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will leave it up to the minister to call relevancy in regard to that particular grouping.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, if you wanted to bring it in here – I was not sure whether it was this one, or the next one that we were doing.

Dr LIM: Well, you tell me!

Mrs MILLER: I am a little confused also.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We can bring it over to the next one, or we can do it now.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If I might offer a suggestion, minister, that he poses a question, and you discuss it with your advisors. If you believe it belongs to that output, take it and, if not, we will wait until it gets to the relevant output.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It belongs to the next output, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. We will save it until then, member for Greatorrex. Yes, member for Katherine? Yes, they are finished.

Mrs MILLER: I am not sure whether I should ask this one in this output either, or the next one, after listening to the member for Nelson. I was going to ask a couple of questions in that Natural Resources Regulation and Enforcement. Now, I am a little confused, so I will probably ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will extend the same courtesy, shadow minister, that you ask the question; if the minister deems it belonging in the next output group ...

Mrs MILLER: Okay, we are still in management activities. I wanted to know how many water licences and clearing permits had been issued in the Daly region and the Katherine region in 2005-06?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is under the next output, as I understand it.

Mrs MILLER: It is under the next output? Okay, I got that one right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You can always step up to the next output, shadow minister, but you just cannot get back. That being the case, are there any more questions under Output Group 3.0, Natural Resources, Output 3.1, Natural Resources Assessment? Member for Greatorrex, we are still on Output 3.1.

Dr LIM: Right. If we are, move on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Okay, that concludes consideration of Output 3.1.

Output 3.2 – Natural Resources Management Activities

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

Mrs MILLER: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, how much have you received from the federal government in grants funding for Natural Resources Management for 2006-07?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to Clare Milikins, the Chief Financial Officer of the department.

Ms MILIKINS: In terms of agency revenue from the Commonwealth, we received specific purpose Commonwealth grants in the budget in the 2005-06 period of \$7.6m, and in the 2006-07 period of \$11.7m. Obviously, finance has changed since the budget was brought down and Commonwealth agencies continue to grant funding, which the minister mentioned earlier.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, thank you. The next question that I have is that the budget for 2006-07, in Budget Paper No 3, page 236, shows that there is quite a significant decrease of nearly \$8m in the overall budget. Why is there such a substantial decrease in the budget?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Katherine, I outlined some of that in my opening statement. That difference would be about \$8.1m. I refer that question to the Chief Financial Officer. Here it is: 'Because grant funding continues to be received right up until the end of the financial year, the department loses a significant amount of carryover totalling \$8.15m from 2004-05'. If you wanted more explanation and detail on that, member for Katherine, I will refer that to Clare Milikins, who could provide you with further detail.

Mrs MILLER: No, that is not necessary, it is just carryover from the previous year. That is not necessary. Minister, how much have you allocated to the Daly River protection program and how are you monitoring that program? Also, has there been a report on that protection program? How often will there be a report, and will it be made public?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Three points. What was allocated, member for Katherine, is \$3.5m over the four years. Approximately \$0.5m was allocated in 2005-06 for the Daly River under the Living Rivers, and \$121 000 was provided for the establishment of the CRG. For the Aboriginal reference group, \$375 498 was allocated.

Mrs MILLER: What will they be doing, minister? What is the Aboriginal Reference Group's role?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: They will provide that expertise. They are important stakeholders, and they will be able to provide support to the Daly River Management Advisory Council.

Mrs MILLER: I need to have my memory refreshed on this, minister, because I cannot quite remember: is there representation on the Daly River protection program by the horticultural and pastoral industries and members of the Daly River region?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There is the Daly River Management Advisory Committee, which is made up of those various representatives, which includes the Cattlemen's Association and other stakeholders, as I understand. Then there is the Aboriginal reference group that provides that reference and support; it is like a subcommittee of the Daly River Management Advisory Committee. The process and building those is actually done within the department, and I will get David Ritchie to talk on it.

Dr RITCHIE: The Daly River Management Advisory Committee is designed to be a fairly tight group of around eight or nine people who can actually make decisions and work with the community. The membership of that will be broadly representative of the sectors that actually use the river: the landowners who make their living from horticulture and pastoral activities, tourism and the wider downstream community. The way it is anticipated working is that there would be a series of sector specific subcommittees, one of which will be the Indigenous Reference Group that the minister was referring to earlier.

The Cattlemen's Association has been working for over a year on a project which has been funded through the Landcare program and they have a local committee. We expect there will be similar subcommittees formed for, perhaps, recreational fishing interests or tourism interests as the whole program unfolds. The idea is to keep the management advisory committee tight and able to work as a committee, informed by larger subcommittees representing sectoral interests.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. Has there been a report on that Daly River protection program to date?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There was the one report that was done when the first community reference group was sitting. There was that one report, but there is not a second report.

Mrs MILLER: How often do you expect them to put a report in with you - annually?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It will be regular reporting but, until the committee is re-established - there would be regular reporting.

Mrs MILLER: Has that Daly River Management Advisory Committee been set up?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That will be set up. The department has done most of the work. The expressions of interest have been out. That has come out from the various sectors for their representation. That is waiting for life in terms of the appointment of the different representatives on that advisory committee.

Mrs MILLER: I need to understand exactly how it is going to work, because they have had a couple of things happen out there, and now it has been disbanded, and now we have this new one - this Daly River Management Advisory Committee. Then you are going to have subcommittees that advise from their interests to the Daly River Management Advisory Committee?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The first committee, the CRG, was set up originally to look at the whole issue. We are not just talking about the Daly River, as you know, it is the whole catchment area including the upper Daly and going down. That was looking at a whole host of areas. That work was finished, so there was no need to continue that same committee.

We then made the announcement. All stakeholders recognised that there was still further work to do. Also, for the implementation of the recommendations that came out of the first committee, there needed to be a continuation and an overseeing of those recommendations to ensure they were implemented. The establishment of the Daly River Management Advisory Committee is to then continue and take the next step for the next stage of the work that needs to be done.

Mrs MILLER: Are the terms of reference for this Daly River Management Advisory Committee the same terms of reference that we had for the original council?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, you would not want to reinvent the wheel again.

Mrs MILLER: So, you are using the same terms of reference?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Sorry, when I said the same terms of reference, you would not want to go back and use the same terms of reference, because this is about the committee taking the next step forward. You would have separate terms of reference. You would not go back over the same work that was done before, so it is going forward with a new terms of reference, one would hope.

Mrs MILLER: The reason I was asking that is because there has been some concern expressed that it was just another group of people. Because the outcome from the first committee was not satisfactory to what government was expecting it to be, that is why a new one was formed called the Daly River Management Advisory Committee. They are the comments that have been made to me and that is the reason why I asked you if the terms of reference have been changed.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Just for further clarification on that, member for Katherine, I have met with various representatives who have also couched their concerns that they did not want to be going over, or appear to be going over, the same old ground; that they were going to be moving forward, and it was going to have some substance to move forward and to be able to implement some of the previous recommendations that came out of the CRG. For further clarification, I will refer this to the CEO of the department.

Dr RITCHIE: The original community reference group found a couple of major things. One is that they determined the high value of maintaining the environmental flow of the river at a certain level. The other thing that they determined was that there was insufficient scientific evidence about the relationship of the groundwater in the Tindal aquifer feeding the actual Dry Season river flow. As a result of that, moratoriums were put in place on land clearing pending further information. Since that first report, the department has spent resources in getting new models developed to get the relationship between the aquifers and the river.

The key task for this new group is to look at what is known about the new science that is available, and to then make some determinations about what are appropriate levels of land clearing, and appropriate

levels of river extraction, where they can actually make some decisions about the adaptive management of the river. None of that was done by the first committee, so it is much more hands on, much more practical.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions, shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I believe there is one that belongs in here. Minister, how many water licences and land clearing permits have been issued in the Daly and Katherine region in 2005-06? I rephrase that a bit. How many have been applied for and how many have been issued?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You did ask for it before and I was getting the department figures so that we could answer it in this output, member for Katherine. We could give you a rough estimate but, if you wanted, I will take that on notice and, then, when we come to the end of the output we can give you exact details.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please. Would you put that on notice, Mr Chairman?

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. For the purposes of *Hansard*, shadow minister, would you please restate your question?

Mrs MILLER: How many water licences and land clearing permits have been applied for and issued for in the Katherine region and the Daly region in 2005-06?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, do you accept that question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard* I allocate that question No 9.3. Please continue, shadow minister.

Mrs MILLER: How many community or client natural resources management groups have been supported in the 2005-06 budget period? How many of these were indigenous communities or organisations? The reason I am asking this question is that I am just assessing the interest and support from the indigenous communities.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer this question – you would probably be in a better position to answer this. I am joined at the table by Mr Brent Williams, who is the Executive Director of the Natural Resource Management area.

Mr WILLIAMS: Brent Williams, Executive Director, Natural Resource Management. Of the 111 groups - and I do not have the exact figures to mind - in general terms, there are some 13 bushfire committees, 21 volunteer bushfire brigades, some 30-plus indigenous ranger groups, and the remainder are made up of Landcare groups and similar environmental community groups across the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: That is good. That is the break up of the 111?

Mr WILLIAMS: That is correct.

Mrs MILLER: How many of those, apart from what you have just said that are clearly identified as indigenous organisations, others involving indigenous organisations?

Mr WILLIAMS: Member for Katherine, I cannot give you exact figures. However, for example, one of the regional bushfire committee is an indigenous organisation - the Arnhem region. A number of the other community groups are. I cannot give you the exact figures at the moment.

Mrs MILLER: That is okay. I was just trying to assess the support for natural resources management. That is all.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

Mr WOOD: Yes. Minister, under your strategic programs, you have 22 listed. Are any of those programs related to weed control? If so, could you give us a summary of what those programs are about?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer this question to Mr Brent Williams.

Mr WILLIAMS: Of those 22 programs, nine directly relate to weed management. They include strategies or programs such as the Katherine Regional Weed Management Strategy; draft management plans and the like for Territory-wide WONS species, such as parkinsonia and prickly acacia; an eradication strategy for cabomba in Darwin River; a draft management strategy for gamba grass in the Territory, and so on.

Mr WOOD: I have to ask the question: how did gamba get into a weed strategy program after the minister for Primary Industry described it as a 'wonderful' plant earlier today?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Is that a question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: How is gamba in a weed strategy plan? Even though I probably agree with you, but how does it get into that plan if it is not a weed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that to Mr Brent Williams.

Mr WILLIAMS: Gamba grass is a species which has been used extensively for pastures in the past but, unfortunately, has some properties which are not so valuable. That has been recognised by landholders, community groups and the industry. As a part of that process and the draft management strategy, it is looking at balancing those threats and positive aspects of the plant in a management context.

Mr WOOD: Lastly, on the cabomba weed, are we winning or are we losing the fight?

Mr WILLIAMS: We are winning the fight at this stage.

Mr WOOD: Do you expect success in the short term, or is this going to be a long-term program to control it and eradicate it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Williams.

Mr WILLIAMS: Initially, we thought it would be a short-term process when we first discovered the weed in Darwin River. Unfortunately, we also discovered last year that the species was setting seed for the first time – the first recorded in Australia. We are recommencing eradication processes this year and we will have information of the likely scale and longevity of the program after the results of this year.

Mr WOOD: What mechanisms are you using to control the weed this time?

Mr WILLIAMS: We are using two principle approaches this Dry Season. One is a physical shading for appropriate areas, which is an attempt to both kill the plant and stop it setting seeds. We are also continuing to apply a herbicide, as per the first program in 2004.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr MILLS: Through the Chair, my question is regarding FrogWatch, a very effective and important community group. I note that they have been in receipt of valued funding. Will that funding continue once this round has expired?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer this question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: That is in the next output. As I understand it, FrogWatch has not applied for further funding from this department this year. We understand they have been successful in receiving funding from the Commonwealth.

Mr MILLS: Fair enough. Just to clarify that, I thought it was the big bulk of their funding from the Northern Territory government to date. Minister, through the Chair?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, their funding is about to come. I have not talked to FrogWatch. I have not received any application or submission from FrogWatch to continue their funding, member for Blain.

Mr MILLS: Okay. Minister, if they were then to make application, is it likely that it will be successful and that the program continue?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would need to assess that. I recognise the important work that FrogWatch does in the community. It will have to be assessed like any other funding submission that comes after the budgets have been set, member for Blain. I certainly recognise the importance of the work of FrogWatch and what they have been doing with cane toads. It will be assessed along those same merits, but I have not received anything from them to date.

Mr MILLS: Therefore, do I understand that the only problem is that they have not approached the Northern Territory government for security of funding?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, member for Blain, their funding was for a set period. As I understand, it was for three years. I will just get that confirmed. Was it for two or three years? Oh, it was for the one year. Any funded organisation, if you have funding for a year, you know that you are going to have to reapply to that government agency again for the next year's funding. As I said, I have not received any submission from FrogWatch.

Mr MILLS: No, I understand that. Minister, if you were in that organisation, hypothetically, would you have some concerns about the future, in the fact that there has not been an application made and there appears to be no assurance that their valuable work is to continue?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With all respects, member for Blain, surely to goodness FrogWatch should have had some indication. They knew that they had funding for 12 months; that they would need to talk to my department. I am not trying to offload or dismiss this, but the onus for further funding is the responsibility of that organisation: that they have 12 months funding and, that during that 12 month period, that they would talk to my department. I know that they are having negotiations with the Commonwealth department, and we have also supported their application to the Commonwealth for the Ringwood project and other areas that they are doing. The onus would be on FrogWatch, before the 12-month period had finished, that they would be involved in negotiations with government for further funding - not me running to them to do that.

Mr MILLS: Thank you, minister. We will need to get to the bottom of this one. I will do some work after estimates. Finally on this, the subsidy scheme, is that operated through your department?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What subsidy?

Mr MILLS: The cane toad trap subsidy scheme.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes. You have brought that forward, but it was in the next output. I could get that for you if you wanted to.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, I would appreciate, we have been very good at keeping outputs and the material together. If you would leave it to the next output, it might be best to wait and get to it.

Mr MILLS: My apologies for messing it up.

Mr WOOD: A sheep escaping from the paddock.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, the information is associated with the next output.

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

Mr MILLS: Well, no, I will wait. I presume, therefore, that if I were to ask about keeping an eye on the gamba grass problem, that would be regulation enforcement? I just do not want to let ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No. It is what we are in now, so if you wanted to ask about gamba grass.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We are on weeds, not toads.

Mr MILLS: All right. I do not want to waste the time and ask the wrong question in the wrong category, that being ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister has indicated that anything relating to gamba grass is in this particular output.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are on the Natural Resource Management Activities output.

Mr MILLS: It is regarding dealing with outbreaks of gamba grass enforcement etcetera, in here?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr MILLS: Can you describe the activities of the agency in dealing with landowners who have outbreaks or large stands of gamba grass on their property? What sort of action is taken by the agency?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer that question to Brent Williams.

Mr WILLIAMS: Gamba grass is not a declared weed in the Northern Territory; however, it does have recognisable invasive characteristics. When people seek assistance in relation to management of that plant, as an undesirable plant on their property, we provide advice and strategic support in coordinating their efforts with other property owners around. One reflection of that is to draft a management strategy for gamba grass and a range of publications and advice to community members.

Mr MILLS: Say there is a landowner in Howard Springs, and his five acre is not looked after and is just full of gamba grass; is there anything that you can actually do to get that landowner to address that issue?

Mr WILLIAMS: From a regulatory point of view, no.

Mr MILLS: No. All right, I will leave it.

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

Dr LIM: Yes, well, I think I do. Every time I raise this question it is in the next category, in the next category. We will find out when we eventually get there, won't we?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is bound to happen.

Dr LIM: The minister is not paying attention anyway.

Mr CHAIRMAN: She is gathering more advice so she can answer your question more fully.

Dr LIM: She does not know what my question is.

Mr CHAIRMAN: This is the one you have asked three times, isn't it?

Dr LIM: Minister, are we now talking about wildlife? We are. Okay. Minister, with regards to wildlife, I understand in Darwin that you have an organisation called Wildcare, and that is something that is very new to me. Do you provide them with funding and what level of funding do you provide for what purpose?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Greatorex, I have some figures. It is approximately \$43 000 total per annum. With Wildcare - there are two things I have here. If you could just bear with me I will work through with for their conference and then their support. For Wildcare support, we have \$20 000, which is for injured animal services in Alice Springs; \$13 000 in Darwin; and \$10 000 in Katherine. That is per annum which is part of the ...

Dr LIM: \$23 000 in Alice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: \$20 000 per annum, that is in Alice Springs; \$13 000 in Darwin; and \$10 000 in Katherine which is a total of ...

Dr LIM: \$13 000 in Darwin?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: \$13 000, and \$10 000 in Katherine with a total of \$43 000.

Dr LIM: That is not the sum total of wildlife activities, I assume. That is only the Wildcare activities we are looking at?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, I will refer this to the CEO of the department to clarify that, member for Greatorex, whether it is wildlife or whether it is Wildcare.

Dr RITCHIE: Dr Lim, that is not just all wildlife. It is the money that we provide to external providers who are involved in either call-outs to the public, and picking up and treating injured wildlife.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, can I reword my question so it can be a bit more specific? What is the budget allocation for the care of wildlife in the Northern Territory?

Dr RITCHIE: Care of wildlife, the whole budget for wildlife?

Dr LIM: Yes, because I cannot find any break-up in the budget book.

Dr RITCHIE: I understand. The wildlife bit of Parks and Wildlife is the Biodiversity Conservation group within the department. So, if you allow me a second or two, I will flick back and I can give you the total budget of Biodiversity Conservation.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If we take it on notice and, then, at the end of those outputs, we can get some of that while we work through that, member for Greatorex?

Dr LIM: Thank you very much, minister. Mr Chairman, if I may ask the minister for that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is a question on notice. For the purpose of *Hansard*, member for Greatorex, will you please restate that question?

Dr LIM: I thought the minister was going to provide me the answer within the session?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, I said we will take it on notice, or if you want to just defer that question and we will get that specific information? You said for wildlife, which is in the biodiversity area. We can get that, if you want to leave it until the end of the output?

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am impressed by the level of trust between the committee and the minister, thank you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We are endeavouring to provide information.

Mr CHAIRMAN: And you are doing a wonderful job.

Dr LIM: The wildlife allocation is to perform what particular function? What I could find in here, in the budget book is, essentially:

- *investigate, monitor, recommend and enforce sustainable utilisation of natural resources including water, native vegetation and wildlife;*
- ...
- *protect heritage sites and objects and threatened wildlife;*
- *predict and mitigate threats created by floods, wildfires, invasive species, resource degradation and nuisance wildlife; and*

Those are the three agency profiles that I can find. What do you specifically do with the wildlife?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: The agency profile is lumping some like things together, so that those dot points are then teased out in the actual output groups. The output is implemented in legislation and regulation to the allocations of sustainable use of the Territory's natural resources and wildlife. That is the output we are in at the moment. That particular output picks up all of the regulatory enforcement bit of the Parks and Wildlife Service, so that the *Parks and Wildlife Act* makes it an offence to remove or interfere with wildlife, and that is enforced through that provision.

In addition to that, within that group and what we do for wildlife, is that we have to understand a lot about them. There is a big research program which goes behind that, both into species and their habitats. That then informs other areas of the agency and, indeed, government, so if we are doing an environmental impact assessment, for instance, then it is that part of the department that provides information on the likelihood of endangered species in the area, what the affects might be on habitat and all that sort of thing. So, there is a police function and a research function in that output.

Dr LIM: Minister, does the function of caring for wildlife in the Territory include the capture, breeding and return to nature programs?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that for further clarification to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: Yes, there are some programs and they are covered in that community service obligation which is paid to wildlife parks GBD. A component of that is buying that service back from the GBD so they have programs for the breeding of the usually endangered small mammals and release in the wild.

Dr LIM: Okay, taking it one step further, do you have a program to care for injured wildlife?

Dr RITCHIE: This comes to where we were before. Within that, we have an allocation which we provide, which is basically outsourced - but the budget comes from within this output - to subsidise volunteer groups and some private suppliers. They were the figures given by the minister before; that is, \$20 000 in Alice Springs; \$13 000 in Darwin; \$10 000 in Katherine, with a total of \$43 000. Unfactored in there is that, from time to time, rangers are called upon to perform those services as well. However, that is cash paid out to external providers.

Dr LIM: When called out to perform functions, are the rangers on official capacity under the auspices of Parks and Wildlife to ensure that injured animals, once nurtured back to health, are released? Is that a Parks and Wildlife function?

Dr RITCHIE: No, that is not part of Parks and Wildlife's function. It is not a function conferred in the act. It is one we would do from time to time as needs arise, just as part of being good community citizens and good neighbours. It is why we outsource whenever we can, as it is preferable that those services are provided by specialists. In many cases, regrettably, we are talking about euthanising terminally injured animals.

Dr LIM: So when animals are returned to health and are required to be released back into their own habitat, does Parks and Wildlife accept that, as part of its normal duty, that the person who has nurtured the animal to health can come back to Parks and Wildlife and say: 'We have the animal, can you now release it?' Is that part of the function, or is it just when an officer feels that he likes to do it, he will do it as a volunteer himself or herself?

Dr RITCHIE: It is not part of the function. As I said, the re-release of the animals that have been kept in captivity is very problematic and has to be managed on a case-by-case basis. We certainly do not encourage the public to bring animals and expect them to be satisfactorily released. As I said, it is an area that, in most cases, it is better outsourced.

Dr LIM: If the minister would take me through some steps. If I happen to drive along the Stuart Highway and I come across an animal that is injured - say, an eagle with broken wing. I can drive over it, or do I ring up Parks and Wildlife and say there is an injured bird?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We will report you to the animal welfare if you drive over it, member for Greatorex!

Dr LIM: In other words, in your interjections, you are saying, do not drive over it. Therefore, if I am near Katherine or Alice Springs, I should ring up Parks and Wildlife and say there is an injured bird on the ground. What happens there?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I just ask the question of the member for Greatorex. We are interrogating the budget. Can I ask what this is about?

Dr LIM: Obviously, how this \$33 000 is spent. The minister says it is provided for the care of injured wildlife.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will remind members of the time, it is 3.55 pm and the session finishes at 6 pm.

Dr LIM: All right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, it is your call.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer again to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: As I said, regrettably, Dr Lim, in many cases, the service that is provided by the veterinary clinics involves euthanising animals. The emphasis is primarily on reducing suffering of animals; it is not about rehabilitating animals back into the wild. I am talking about if it comes to the Parks service. In that particular case, if you were driving and you had injured an animal, and you were worried about its health and whether it was suffering, you could then - and people do - contact the Parks and Wildlife officer in Tennant Creek and they would assist in euthanising the animal.

Dr LIM: What does this \$33 000 do? How is that spent? If a person in the public picks up a bird with a broken wing in urban Darwin, where do they go with that bird? Do they go to the local vet as a volunteer? If I pick up a bird off the street and took it to a local vet, it would be at my cost. Is the government saying: 'Do not bother, kill the bird', or is the government saying: 'Take it to Parks and Wildlife and we will do something with it', or 'You do what you like'?

Dr RITCHIE: No, I was answering your question. I thought you were asking what would happen if you contact the Parks and Wildlife service and what their role was. What this money is there for is because we appreciate that there is good community interest in avoiding the situation you talked about of having injured animals limping around the roads, and that members of the public are understandably distressed by that.

What we do is provide hotline numbers for participating, outsourced agents, in this case, or other organisations set up or veterinary clinics that are participating, where people can go and take the animals. This money provides, if you like, that service. We purchase that service on behalf of the community. It is not something that is part of the core business of the Parks and Wildlife Service, but it is in recognition that the community reasonably expects to have a place to go if they run over a bird on the road and are worried about it.

Dr LIM: Is there a particular person who was or is doing the job and is now on long leave and, therefore, not doing the job now, and the job has been outsourced to somebody or to a vet clinic without going through procurement?

Dr RITCHIE: This is getting into a level of detail of the operations of this division. Our general approach is as I have described. From time to time, there have been officers who have been, because of demand, dedicated to following up calls and to referring people. That situation is subject to change on the basis of the resources.

Dr LIM: It is my understanding, minister - and you might correct me on this - there are probably some 100 members in the Top End or in Darwin who are actually volunteer carers who are contacted, in fact, by somebody in Parks and Wildlife who says: 'We have a wounded animal here, would you take it home to care for this animal?' I stumbled across that. I honestly stumbled across that accidentally on the weekend when I saw this particular woman carrying two cloth bags with a couple of wallabies ...

Mr WOOD: It was Noel.

Dr LIM: It was not Noel. She was bottle feeding those two wallabies and I asked the question and that is what I was told. Parks and Wildlife, obviously, asked the woman to care for the wallabies and she did - but at her own cost. Nobody reimburses her for this. I am asking: if Parks and Wildlife is contacting volunteers to do a certain role, is there a role for government to support these volunteers?

Dr RITCHIE: There are a number of organisations - more than one - and groups that are volunteers in the strict sense of the word, and they approach the department and say that they are prepared to do this work. As I have said before, we recognise that it is important and there is a community expectation that that service will be provided. We have allocated \$43 000 across the regions to that work. We will always consider better ways of providing it. However, at the moment - and I agree - we rely on members of the community who regard it as their community service to nurse sick and injured animals.

Dr LIM: Sorry to be pressing the point, but it appears to me that that is not a satisfactory conclusion to it all. An injured animal is reported by a member of the public to Parks and Wildlife. Parks and Wildlife contacts the volunteer to come to Parks and Wildlife and pick up the animal. The animal is then nursed to

health and, in my mind, an animal that has been humanly handled may not be able to return to nature as well. There needs to be some sort of training for the animal to return to nature. Does Parks and Wildlife accept the responsibility to do that?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I just wonder if you could rule. We have gone through about five or six questions on this issue. There has been sufficient information provided in relation to this, unless the member for Greatorex ...

Dr LIM: I think ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Hold on a minute. The CEO has provided information on the wildlife services that the department provides, in total cooperation and working with a number of volunteers. I know that this has been an issue. The lady who has raised this issue and where you are coming from in this questioning has approached my office for a meeting. She has had meetings with the department; she is not satisfied with the department and she is awaiting a meeting with me. We can continue to go down this road. The department has addressed this issue and will continue to work with these volunteers. You can continue pursuing but, unless you bring out what exactly you are alluding to, member for Greatorex, we can just keep going.

Dr LIM: The minister is obviously trying ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The chief executive officer has answered your question quite appropriately, five different ways.

Dr LIM: Obviously, the minister is not prepared to pursue this. Let me ask you the next question, then. With regards to the national conference that I raised at the very beginning of this afternoon, which is proposed to be held in August of this year, which is only a few weeks away, is there any assistance from government for Wildcare to provide this conference in Darwin?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have not received any application or information that Wildcare is holding a conference. I have not received anything in my office in relation to the funding or support of such a conference, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: Well, would it be worth their while to approach you, minister, or would it be just like the Ombudsman, who said it would be a futile exercise?

Mr CHAIRMAN: What is your question there?

Dr LIM: I am asking the minister whether she would look at this favourably, or if it would be a futile exercise?

Mr CHAIRMAN: The minister was not here for the Ombudsman's ...

Dr LIM: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: How does she comment if she was not here for that?

Dr LIM: No, I am saying, would the minister meet with the people from Wildcare and talk to them in a positive manner, or would it be, in the words of the Ombudsman, a futile exercise?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, regarding a futile exercise, if the member for Greatorex had been listening, I said before that this particular individual has approached my office to seek a meeting with myself. I have yet to have that meeting with that particular individual that he is talking about. However, I will certainly assess that.

Regarding Wildcare and the support from the department, and free access to the Territory Wildlife Park. There are a number of things that the department is already providing to this group, so it is not as if there is not support there for them to do this conference. Like any organisation, if you are going to hold a conference, surely to goodness, it is the responsibility of the organisers in these groups to try to source different avenues of funding. You do not advertise or call a conference and then, suddenly, say: 'Oh dear, we have no funding'. If you are going to look at planning a conference, the planning is done, I would have thought, way before the actual date. I believe the member for Greatorex mentioned that the conference is in August?

Dr LIM: That is correct.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Which does not leave much time for the planning has been done. I believe that we have answered that question, Mr Chairman.

Dr LIM: I will not labour this any further. I hope, minister, that you know who you are talking about, because I do not know who you are talking about. I do not know who is coming to see you. I honestly do not. As I said to you, I stumbled over a lady who was carrying two pouches with a couple of wallabies in those bags, and she was hand feeding them. That is how I found out about this whole story. I hope you will pursue this issue with them and support them when they have to hold a conference in Darwin. No further questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regards to that output, which was Output Group 3.2, National Resource Regulation and Enforcement.

Mrs MILLER: Can I ask a general question? It is not a hard one.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Only if it is in relation to Output 3.2.

Mrs MILLER: I would have thought so.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Try it.

Mrs MILLER: How many saltwater crocodiles have been removed from the Katherine River in the last 18 months, from 2005 until now?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Does that belong to this output, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is the next output.

Mrs MILLER: The next output. Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A bold try, shadow minister.

Mrs MILLER: That will give you time to get to the figures.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If there are no further questions in relation to this output, I will close it off. That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 3.3, National Resource Regulation and Enforcement. Before I ask if there are any questions, minister, are you in need of a two minute break or anything of that nature?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If I could, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will return as soon as the minister returns.

The committee suspended.

Output 3.3 – Natural Resource Regulation Enforcement

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 3.3, Natural Resource Regulation Enforcement. Are there any questions, shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, could you give the committee the number of crocodiles that have been removed from the Katherine River and the Katherine Gorge in 2005 up until now?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, in relation to the shadow's question, 11 last year, and nine this year to date.

Mrs MILLER: A few too many, isn't it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, that is right.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions, shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: No, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in regard to this output?

Mr WOOD: Is this 3.3?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is.

Mr WOOD: Minister, is it possible to supply figures which show the total production of bores operated by Power and Water, which you licence, from the rural bore fields, which are fed into the McMinns Reserve over the last 10 years? Is that possible? Do you have those figures?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have those figures here with me; however, I will take that question on notice.

Question on Notice

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

Mr WOOD: Could the department supply the water production figures for the production bores operated by Power and Water that supply the McMinns Reservoir?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, will you accept that question on notice?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 9.4. Please continue, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: That is the only question I had.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions in relation to this output? No, that being the case that concludes consideration of Output 3.3.

Output 3.4 - Flood Forecasting

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 3.4, Flood Forecasting. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is this about the road just outside of Alice?

Mrs MILLER: Funny about that, wasn't it? Unfortunately, I was not in Katherine for the recent floods; I was somewhere else recovering. However, I had some phone calls about serious concerns about the flood forecasting and the flood warning systems that were in the Katherine Gorge and on the Katherine River. There still seems as if there might be some way to go to improve that system. What has been done? Is there any investigation being lodged into the flood warning system for the Katherine River and the Katherine River catchment?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I thank the shadow. I will quickly outline because, after the flood, I did make a ministerial statement in parliament. It was the Chief Minister's statement that she brought forward and each of the agencies have responded. That was done on 2 May, and I am glad that you have come back, member for Katherine, and recovered.

Barry Chambers is to submit a report to the Counter Disaster Council, which will cover a range of issues, including the need for an improved flood warning system which would be widely understood and accepted by the public, improved ways of coordinating and disseminating flood information utilising modern communication technology, together with other educational and media aspects. NRETA is contributing to the development of the report and will ensure that it provides the best service in line with resource availability. If you wanted further information in relation to that, I will refer the question to John Gilmour, who is the Executive Director of the Land and Water area within the department.

Mr GILMOUR: John Gilmour, Executive Director, Land and Water. Thank you for the question. Flood forecasting is a significant issue for our organisation. As you may be aware, we provide and forward those forecasts to the emergency services for action.

Within the Northern Territory, there is what we call a flood warning working group, which advises the Counter Disaster Council of the Northern Territory. That flood warning working group is charged with looking at the experiences of Katherine and other floods which occurred in the Top End over April. We have had a number of meetings of that committee. Barry Chambers and Anne Shepherd, the Mayor of Katherine, Police and Emergency Services, our department, the Bureau of Metrology and a number of other organisations were part of those meetings. We looked at a range of issues, including the ones mentioned by the minister, to improve both the awareness, the systems we have in place, and how we can do it better. It is also evaluating, to some extent, what might be able to be done to ameliorate floods in the Katherine area. That is not designing any particular structure or any thing like that, but just what systems may be able to be used to ameliorate flooding.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, are you able to add to that and give some sort of reassurance to the people of Katherine - especially I am referring to it at the moment - that there will be some significant changes made before the next Wet Season?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, as we said, member for Katherine, we can always improve and do better. Certainly, that is why NRETA is contributing to the Counter Disaster Council report in how we can better improve those services in times of flood, because it is quite distressing. I was in living in Katherine in the 1998 floods, and it was quite distressing. Thank goodness, this year, the recent flood was not as great as the 1998 floods. We can only look at what happened and what went wrong, or look across the various agencies and look at a better response. That is what is being done through the Barry Chambers report which we are contributing to.

Mrs MILLER: When will the report by Barry Chambers be completed? Will it be released to the public?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That will be reported back to the Chief Minister. I could not give you an exact date when that will be finalised and to the Chief Minister, member for Katherine. The community of Katherine will be given feedback of anything from that report. I could not give you an exact time of when it is going to be finalised.

Mrs MILLER: I notice in the budget papers that there are to be additional flood forecasting installations in 2006-07. Can you tell me where they will be?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer to Mr John Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: According to Budget Paper No 3, the number of installations is scheduled to increase from 23 to 25. Our installations include what we call stream gauging stations, which measure height of rivers, and telemeter that data back to officers. It also includes rain gauges in catchments. We also have a responsibility to increase our number of rainfall stations but just where we will install those, I cannot advise. That is for the whole of the Northern Territory. We also forecast, as you might be aware, for the Todd River system. We also look at floods in the Victoria River and a number of other streams around the Northern Territory. We would look to see where the best strategic advantage can be gained by installation of additional equipment. But, no, I do not have specific sites at this time.

I might add that, as part of the broader Daly River program for evaluating water resources in the Northern Territory - and it was referred to earlier by the minister and the chief executive - there is funding for improving our water knowledge in the Daly and Katherine Rivers. As part of that, we will be installing a number of stream gauges and other equipment. As well as evaluating the water resources, they can also provide for flood forecasting. We will try and get what you might call double value out of our stations - both evaluating water resources and for flood forecasting.

Mrs MILLER: How does this flood forecast work? How do you tell from this particular forecast in the Katherine River what is happening? Please explain it to me in lay terms so I understand exactly what is happening.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I thank the shadow for her question. I say from the outset that this is actually a new output and it is good that it has come in for the first time into these areas and into the budget. That is a welcome thing that it has come through. I will refer that question to Mr John Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: There are two types of what we call flood forecasting. One is where we use predictions based on upstream river heights and, from correlation from past floods and our knowledge of the general rainfall in an area, we correlate that and give some river heights downstream. I will say what we do with those heights in a minute.

The other one, and it is the system we have for the Katherine town, is a much more complex computer-driven model which is worked in association with the Bureau of Meteorology - a very complex model which works on the amount of rainfall which falls on a catchment and the known river heights and the flows in the river. That is called a rainfall routing model. I will not go into the details, but we know from the amount of rain that has fallen, the river heights and the flows that we have done from our gauge into the river, how much flow there is. We also know the characteristics of rivers in the area.

Using the data I have just talked about from our rainfall we have gathered and telemetered in, the river heights, we forecast up to 24 hours in advance, on the basis of the rain that has fallen, what the height will be, for example, for Katherine at the Katherine old railway bridge. So it not the height at Nitmiluk; it is the height at the railway bridge. For instance, in the recent floods, we had a forecast of 19 m. That was the given example for the maximum, probably about 11 hours in advance of the maximum time. We forecast that height some 11 hours before that height was reached. We had given forecasts about every six to 12 hours prior to that for what the predicted height at a future time would be. We update those heights.

After the 1998 floods, very substantial work was done to develop that model I have just talked about. In addition, it is no use just having the heights that would be at the railway bridge. You need to know, obviously, what the height at the railway bridge means for where the water is going to flood. It is not easy to do that, because it depends on whether there has been rain over, for example, the Tindal system, also local rain. However, in this case, we do have maps that say, for the particular height of the railway bridge, what levels the water will reach throughout the town. So, for every 0.5 metre intervals of river heights and railway bridge, we have what the depth of the water will be in the town. I could probably go on for a number of hours, but I will not do that.

Mrs MILLER: I just find that very interesting. It is a very complex system and, yet, some people in Katherine still feel that it failed them during this particular unfortunate incident we had in April. Thank you very much for that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mrs MILLER: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any members of the panel who wish to question anything in regard to that output? No. That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 3.4.

Output 3.5 – Hydrographic and Drilling Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions for Output 3.5, Hydrographic and Drilling Services. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: How many people are employed in Hydrographic and Drilling, and what is their level of employment?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It was tabled here before in the staffing numbers. I will refer that question to Mr John Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: Within the Hydrographic and Drilling section there are 28 staff. I can provide the detailed list. I can read it out to you. I do not have them numbered, but there are types of levels. They vary from a P3 level, we have a number of T5 levels - I am not sure if that is the information that you are seeking - T4s down to T2s in that branch.

Mrs MILLER: How many water resource monitoring stations does your department maintain?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer that question to John Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: We have what we call - as per Budget Paper No 3 - 200 gauging stations located throughout the Northern Territory. As I previously advised, those gauging stations are hydrology networked, and include our river height monitoring stations and also rainfall stations, because that is just as much part of our water resources work. That is augmented, of course, by Bureau of Meteorology gauges, which are only sparse throughout the Northern Territory. I might add that, in addition to those gauging stations which measure surface water levels and rainfall, we have a large number of monitoring boards throughout the Northern Territory, which may also be considered to be hydrology. However, this year we determined to provide the information on the surface water.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, I just wanted to know how many gauging stations there were in the Katherine region and the Daly region. How often do you collect data from those?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to Mr Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: In the Katherine River, from the bridge and upstream of that, we have seven gauging stations in that system. That data is collected in two ways. One is, it is done on a routine basis, so that might be every six or 12 hours and, also, for that particular gauging station, when there is a particular change in height. Obviously, during most periods of the year, we are only going to be reporting every 12 hourly or 6 hourly because there is no change in water levels. You might be aware that these gauging stations are mainly in isolated areas and we rely on battery power, so the less number of times that we telemeter our data back, that makes the station more reliable, and we do not run our batteries down.

During floods, we have predetermined intervals where we relay that information back by telemeter systems. We can also interrogate those and, during a flood, our people will sit at the office and interrogate the stations to see the particular height at any time.

Mrs MILLER: That is even when it is under water?

Mr GILMOUR: None of our gauging stations were under water during the Katherine flood.

Mrs MILLER: That is all from me, thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regard to this output?

Mr WOOD: Yes, thank you. Minister, I notice that there has been an increase in the number of operational rig days. Does that mean your department is drilling more holes in the ground? Secondly, do you have a policy between commercial drillers and your own drillers as to how many holes you will drill so you are not competing too much with the commercial drillers?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Member for Nelson, we endeavour not to compete, but I will refer this question to Mr John Gilmour.

Mr GILMOUR: There were two questions there. Why is the - I think it was why?

Mr WOOD: Yes.

Mr GILMOUR: The operational rig days?

Mr WOOD: That is right, and they have increased.

Mr GILMOUR: The number of operational rig days have been increased because we have had additional resourcing for that operation of our drilling rigs. Through the government, we have obtained funding for the Daly River system, and we have also been very successful in obtaining grants because of our program we have from the Commonwealth government under the National Water Initiative, Water Smart program, which has additionally provided funding for the Gulf water study. With additional resources, we can utilise those rigs more. Our rigs have also been subject to extensive maintenance in the past year. Also, in training of our staff, we had a significant period last year when our staff were doing training. This year will be more focused on operating the rigs.

The policy in respect to use of the rig for commercial purposes, I believe, was your query. That is a government policy. Our policy is that we do not do commercial work unless the person who is seeking the use of a government drilling rig applies to the minister for authority to use the rig. In those circumstances, the minister will consider whether a commercial rig is able to do that work, and whether it is for the benefit of the community of the Northern Territory. In making that decision, the minister would also advise the person, or the company, or Power and Water as it may be, who are seeking the use of that rig, that all charges will be on a full commercial basis which are comparable prices to the commercial sector.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in relation to that output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 3.0

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 - ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION **Output 4.1 - Environment Protection Agency**

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed with Output Group 4.0, Environment Protection, Output 4.1, Environment Protection Agency. Are there any questions?

Mrs MILLER: I believe we might have a couple, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please go ahead.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would not have expected anything other, shadow minister.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, it has been really interesting to follow all the publicity and media about the independent EPA. I am just leading into my question – and I will have a question.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am sure you will. It is quite okay to set a contextual framework for the minister to fully answer the question.

Mrs MILLER: I just have a little difficulty with the word 'independent'. The word 'independent', to me, means it is separate, and it is not part of. I thought perhaps I was making that up so I checked the dictionary and that is exactly what it says. Minister, why do you still insist on calling this an 'independent' EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, member for Katherine, we went around this in part when there was that motion brought into parliament, for both your and the member for Nelson's purposes so that you could both understand what we meant in terms of the EPA's establishment and where they stood. I know there has been constant dispute from both the CLP and the member for Nelson regarding the independence of the EPA and the interim EPA Board. We have tried to work through this process with both you and the member for Nelson, of what we meant by independent. There will be a system of independence with the board, or whatever model, once established. That was something we gave a commitment to and that we are working towards.

Mrs MILLER: Given your proposed model that you have set up here - I do not know if you want me to table that, but it is a summary of a proposed preferred EPA model. Given when you gave us that document, do you want me to table that? It is a summary of a proposed ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Is that your document or my document?

Mrs MILLER: ... preferred EPA model that was given to us. I am presuming it is yours. It actually has a graph here that describes ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment please, member. Are you presuming, or alleging or just – we have had a couple of instances of documentation ...

Mrs MILLER: I am asking, first of all minister, is that the proposed preferred EPA model?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, can I categorically say no. I know the information and the paper the member for Katherine has. There was a document that was leaked, and it is interesting that the member for Katherine has a copy of that document. This was a document, mind you, that had not come to me for ratification or to take through to Cabinet. It was a document that was bypassed somewhere across the

agencies and fell mysteriously into the hands of the Minerals Council. People have all seized on this and thought that this was a *fait accompli*. This was a draft document that was circulating amongst agencies as to a proposed EPA, or a model. I state quite clearly, member for Katherine, because I know there has been criticism, again, from the CLP and also the independent member for Nelson, in terms of, why consult again ...

Mr WOOD: That is not true.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. If you do not consult, then you get criticised for not consulting and, therefore, we should be going out to the community. There needs to be a bit of consistency ...

Mr WOOD: It could be ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I am addressing the shadow minister for the Environment in relation to her question. That document, no, is not a position. We have not formed an opinion one way or another on a model. There are a number of models that were discussed and were part of the sessional committee's report. Part of that report is now with the interim board which is going out and doing the consultations with the community as to the preferred model.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. I will say to members of the committee that I am not inclined to accept any documents unless they do come with full attribution. We cannot have documents handed into the committee without us knowing where they came from.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, can we have documents, then, that we show the ministers that we are speaking to, to have verified whether they are authentic or not?

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is not the minister's job to verify documents or other. If you are presenting a document and you wish the minister to comment on it then, I believe in all fairness, you should tell the minister what that document is and where it was sourced from.

Dr LIM: This can be used as a publication.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, I do not have it. I have not seen it. The minister says she has not seen it and the ...

Dr LIM: Well, we have seen the tabled documents in parliament.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I am not going to debate you, member for Greatorex, you know my position.

Dr LIM: There you go, you are denying tabling of legitimate documents, Mr Chairman.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, just following on if I could, with the shadow minister and the paper that she has. It would be good to know. I stated in my previous response that we do know for a fact that there was a document with a model that was leaked through a submission from the department - whether that is that document. There is this document, which has been put out by the interim EPA Board. I repeat interim. This is where I suppose people find it really hard in the interpretation of what 'interim' is; whether it is the 'i' or the 'm' at the end of it, but it is an interim board. They have put out this discussion document towards an EPA for the Northern Territory. It is a discussion paper dated May 2006. In that - and that is where I would like to just confirm with the member for Katherine - there is a proposed structure. There is a lot of difference between the words 'proposed' and 'preferred'. For the record, whether it is this, because it is showing a 'proposed' structure, which is a lot different than a 'preferred' structure.

Mrs MILLER: And I, Mr Chairman, would have to have a look at that before I could verify whether it was the same. As you know, I have only just come back into this position, minister, and I have not seen that document.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If the shadow minister would like to have a copy, this is a public document.

Mr CHAIRMAN: A department publication, is it minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is a publication that has been prepared as part of the interim EPA Board's consultation throughout the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The Secretary is happy to give it to her.

Mrs MILLER: Can I just take a very quick second to have a look? Minister, you talked a moment ago about the interim EPA Board. I did go to school and English was one of my better subjects, so I do understand exactly what 'interim' is, starting with the 'i' and the 'm' at the end. This interim board that you have appointed I presume their responsibility is to look at the model of an EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: What is outlined in that document is a proposed structure for discussion. It is not set in concrete. It is a proposed structure that will generate discussion or debate or whatever, in the wider community, to ascertain and to provide back to me, when they have finished their consultation, a report as to what the preferred model will be for the establishment of an EPA for the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. That having been said, when the interim body of the interim board presents you with the preferred model, you are going to take their decision, after wide consultation with the community, as being the model that you would accept?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Whatever outcome comes from the consultations throughout all the regional centres, that will be put, I assume, in report form, and that would come back to me to take to Cabinet in moving towards the establishment of an EPA.

Mrs MILLER: Is there a time frame for them to go out, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: They have already started the consultation, member for Katherine. There have been three workshops. They have had workshops in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin, on 21 and 22 June, with workshops in Borroloola and Nhulunbuy in July. There is a meeting tonight at the university. Once that consultation has finished by the end of July, then there would be a report that would come to me on a round-up of those consultations that have been conducted to date.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. I have seen the advertisement and it is being advertised as an independent EPA Board consultation, so ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The interim board is independent. These are three quite credible members who have been appointed to head this. They are not part of government; they are separate from government. I know that people get hung up on the word, but they are independent in the sense that they are not part of government.

Mrs MILLER: I understand that the interim board is independent; the three members of the board are independent. However, the perception by the community and ordinary lay people is that an independent EPA, as an agency, is actually independent. It is not the independent board members that I am referring to as being independent because, yes, they may very well be independent, but they are government employees. However, they are out seeking consultations for an independent EPA authority?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, for a model of the establishment of an EPA ...

Mrs MILLER: Okay.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... and what that would involve. There are various models, and the member for Nelson was part of - the select committee have gone around and looked at various models throughout Australia in the other states. The Northern Territory is the only state where you do not have an EPA, so it was looking at the various models, pulling all that together. Part of this consultation is: okay, what is going to be an establishment of an EPA? We gave an election commitment that there would be an independent board, and the funding of that. We are on track to meet both of those commitments.

Mrs MILLER: So, it is an independent board, but it is not an independent authority. You are still going to call it an independent Environment Protection Agency?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We will see what the outcomes of the consultations will be. The consultations will form the basis under which we proceed with the establishment of an EPA.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, I would like to get the Secretary to copy that, if he would, so that he could show the minister, because this particular copy, which is the summary of a proposed preferred EPA model, is exactly the same as the proposed structure that is in this discussion paper that you have given me. It is exactly the same.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I believe I answered that. I know that it is probably the same, yours says 'preferred'. That was a document that was leaked out of the agency.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Minister, if the shadow minister, or any member of the panel, wishes to hand over bits of unattributed paper which state one thing and wish to talk to it, and you wish to respond, then that is up to you. However, I say to the panel and to you, minister, that that piece of paper, that is not attributed - you do not know where it is sourced from or how it was derived - could have just as well been drawn out of a university faculty on anyone's desk. So, treat it as you will, but it bears no authority. Please, get a copy and ...

Mrs MILLER: It is not terribly scary at all, it is a total copy.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, we do not know what it is a total copy of.

Mrs MILLER: Of the proposed structure.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, where did it come from?

Mrs MILLER: It is exactly the same, I just want to verify it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is a photocopy of what is in the book, then?

Mrs MILLER: No, it was taken ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: It is not exactly the same then.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, can I just ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you want to wait until we get that copy so that the shadow minister can enter into a conversation with you about it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would love to have a conversation with the shadow minister about it.

Mrs MILLER: While we are waiting for that, one of the issues that arises out of this proposed structure is that I still keep coming back to that word 'independent', because it really is a false impression that is created to the community, that it is an independent agency. It may be an independent board that is formed to discuss, in the public domain, about the structure of an EPA authority, but it is not independent. I am going to ask you these questions. Minister, does this proposed structure mean it would be a discrete unit of NRETA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I believe I answered that question when we were having the discussion the last time. The interim board has put out a draft discussion document that is going out. The interim board is having consultations with the wider Northern Territory community. Whatever outcomes come from those consultations and discussions with the community will formulate the way forward. The shadow minister is inferring that government has already made up its mind, or already has a preferred model in place. She can correct me if I am wrong. My assumptions are that that is exactly what she is alluding to, and that could not be further from the case. We are awaiting the outcomes of the consultations.

Mrs MILLER: Is there any problem, then, with me asking you about some of the aspects of the proposed structure?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could I seek clarification from the shadow minister? This proposed structure you are talking about - is it the one in the publication that was handed, or is it the one that you have copied? Which proposed structure?

Mrs MILLER: I am talking about the way this is set up.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*.

Mrs MILLER: It is the same diagram.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Can I have a look at it?

Mrs MILLER: I am just talking about the diagram, and just wanting to know if the proposal is ...

Dr Lim: Stop putting your head in the dirt and saying nobody can see your bum.

Mrs MILLER: If the proposal is ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment, please. Would you mind repeating that?

Dr LIM: I said: 'stop putting her head in the sand and saying people cannot see you'.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No. That is not exactly what you said, is it? No, I will check *Hansard* for what you said, member for Greatorex. I would ask you to withdraw your statement.

Dr LIM: There is nothing to withdraw.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. We will check that out and we will talk about this a bit later, member for Greatorex. Please continue.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, this is your preferred model. This proposed structure is the proposal you are putting out.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, it is not. Mr Chairman, can I please ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Let the shadow finish her question. That is a question, is it not, shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Let her finish the question and respond how you wish.

Mrs MILLER: With this proposed structure that you have here, will that be administered by NRETA? Is that the proposal that you have, minister, that it is administered by NRETA? Would NRETA provide the HR and the financial support?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, in response to the shadow minister, as the shadow minister, I am not sure whether you have read the sessional committee's report on their inquiry into an EPA. Through that report, the committee looked at various models across the various states, as I said. Some of those models are within government. The actual agency carries most of the environment protection work. They have a board, or they have a completely statutory body that sits outside of government. There are various models that need to be discussed and looked at.

Obviously, at the end of the day, when those consultations come back – and I would like to make it clear, that is a proposed model, it is not a preferred model. I would also like to make it clear that I do not want you to continually infer that I am saying, or that I have put on the record, that that is government's or my preferred model. It is a proposed model to generate discussion and debate in the wider community. Whatever the outcomes of those discussions, that will come back to me to go to Cabinet for Cabinet's decision. Ultimately, of course, whatever happens, we are the elected members. There is a level of accountability on us for that. There have to be some decisions as to what that model is. For you or anyone else to infer that we have already decided is absolutely ludicrous, unless you have substantive information otherwise.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, through the Chair ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, you may well laugh, member for Nelson, but it is no joke.

Mrs MILLER: I am really just asking you some questions, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And I am answering them.

Mrs MILLER: But you are very defensive. And when you are very defensive ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, maybe because it does get a bit tedious after a while continually attempting to go through this issue with both you and the member for Nelson for some time. We have had substantive motions, a number of discussions and motions on the floor of parliament that - continue, shadow, I should not have interrupted. I apologise.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, as I said, I am merely asking you some questions to clarify for myself, in the estimates process, this proposed structure - and the proposed structure the way it is set out here. I just need to clarify some things that I can see that sit within this proposed structure. Okay? Minister, I am not sure if you answered this question: that NRETA would provide, in this proposed structure, the administrative, HR and financial support for the EPA.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Again, that depends on what model we come up with, member for Katherine. We have a proposed model there. At the information sessions or the consultation that is happening throughout the Northern Territory, people might disagree with that proposed model. They might think: 'Well, we do not like that because it needs to be totally outside of government, and we want this'. That is the ability of public debate to inform as to what is going to be the form and function of a Territory EPA. Of course, we have come up with that proposed structure and that is to get the discussion happening. As to where it fits, the EPA program sits within NRETA at the moment.

Mrs MILLER: In the proposed structure that is here - and I will read this document when I have the opportunity minister but not right now in estimates - in the reporting and the direction, the board would report daily to the minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With any board, those sorts of functionalities of whether it is daily would be worked out. Obviously, the chairperson of that board is going to play a crucial role. I meet quite regularly with the chairperson of the Darwin Harbour Advisory Committee, and with the chair of the Domestic and Family Violence Council on a regular basis. That is not every day, but there are regular meetings. Those appointed boards do meet with me on a regular basis and provide reports, separate from the reports or information that I receive from the department.

Mrs MILLER: In this proposed structure, minister, would this board have to report to you for approval for any minor projects to be undertaken? Would they have to apply to you under this proposed structure, or would they be able to make decisions independently?

Mr SCRYMGOUR: Again, those are areas of function that would be worked out as to what level and function that board will play in overseeing those areas - whether it is major projects or minor projects - and independently reviewing to provide that advice to me, separate from the department regarding different projects.

Mrs MILLER: Have you set a time line for the proposed model to be decided?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: There was a time frame, member for Katherine. I do not have it with me, but there was a commitment and a time frame from the consultation to reporting back. I could provide a copy of this page, which says the EPA board is to draft report for government consideration at the end of this year. I could get this page copied for you, if you would like. It outlines the time frame.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to table it?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, please. Could that be tabled?

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you would like to table that document, feel free to, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The member for Katherine asked for the time frame. I said that I would give her a copy. There is a series of papers here. I said that I would give her a copy of this page rather than the whole document.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you just want to table one page, that is okay. It is up to you what you lay on the table, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I need this document back, that is all, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Perhaps you could organise to get a photocopy and then table the copy.

Mrs MILLER: As I said, I have not been through this document. Are you asking the independent board to seek champions, so to speak, to assist the board in establishment and ongoing with their work? Are you going out to seek champions in the field - for instance, Mines and Energy, or Parks and Wildlife - to help with the establishment of this proposed structure and the board?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, whatever the proposed structure will be. Yes, I suppose the board is out there championing the cause of having an EPA.

Mrs MILLER: Are they seeking advice from other people in different areas? For instance, as I said Parks and Wildlife, or Mines and Energy? Are they seeking advice from those areas?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is imperative - I believe it is important. As you know, I have made the announcements previously of the names of the three members of that interim board in parliament, member for Katherine – Professor Gordon Dove, Professor Donna Craig and Ms Judith King. They will be talking across all of those various agencies and industries that will have an interest in the establishment of an EPA, particularly the Minerals Council.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. When the proposed model is finally decided on, will the structure of the board remain the same, or will there be more members of the board? Will this interim board still remain and become a permanent board, or would you have new appointments to the board with additional members?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It would be a new board. I have said that previously that, in this first stage, to work through this process and get the development happening and working, we would appoint. I gave the commitment that in the second stage, when we move towards a board, we would open that to advertising and there would be a proper public selection process of members to that board.

Mrs MILLER: In this proposed structure you have here, minister - and I have not looked through it - is there only one proposed structure? Were no options given? There is only one proposed structure in here.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of when they are going through with the workshops and the various discussions that they are having throughout the Northern Territory, there is that proposed structure. Much of it is dependent, I suppose, on the focus questions that will lead the discussions when you put up your proposed structure. I will just read some of the questions. 'What is missing from the Northern Territory's environment and planning system that an EPA might be able to deliver? What would be different with an EPA? What value will be ...' I suppose some of the questions that would be put to those forums with that proposed structure would then determine what draft model would be put back to both me and to government as to the establishment of an EPA.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, this is the only proposed structure. Was there a proposed model that had the EPA reporting independently?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I was not part of that. Reading the select committee's report, there are various models that look at statutory bodies outside of government - quasi-government bodies, a number of different models. In the select committee, there were some recommendations out of that.

One of the focus questions that is being asked, just following on from the member for Katherine's question, is what structure and processes are needed. It is looking at the relationship and the board composition, and going through, as part of the workshops and consultations, looking at parliament, the minister's role, the public, the EPA Board, NRETA and what the department might be, the program and all those relations. It is having full discussion about what that structure and the process is, what is needed, what we need to do. All the relationship and composition is part of those discussions.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Minister, is there a proposed model that has the EPA responsible for its own administration of financial and human resources issues?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: As I said, that would be determined by whatever structure you come up with. With all the consultation and the workshops, when it comes back, people might determine that. One of the things that we have given a commitment to, and is part of the discussion, is transparency, accountability and independence. Some of those processes are being worked through as part of the consultation. Sorry, I am just being distracted by the member for Greatorex. I am attempting to ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, I believe you mentioned ...

Dr LIM: I am not talking to the minister, I am talking to my colleague here.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, please have a bit of respect. I ask you to keep your voice down and stop distracting.

Dr LIM: Well, you tell her. I have respect.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I ask you to stop distracting, under Standing Order 51. Okay? We had this thing run off the rails. We will keep it going and get the questions asked. The ball is in your court, member for Greatorex.

Dr LIM: We know where we are. Does the minister not know where she is?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I know quite well where I am, member for Greatorex, thank you.

Dr LIM: Good.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Greatorex, I will put you on a warning. Please continue, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have answered that question, Mr Chairman. If the member for Katherine, the shadow minister, was not listening, I am not going to repeat it.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow minister, your call.

Mrs MILLER: I noticed on the discussion paper for here – it is the first time I have seen it where it has not said ‘the independent Environment Protection Agency’. I am hopeful that it will not be called that any more, because I believe that is misleading.

The breakdown of the estimates in 2005-06 in Budget Paper No 3, page 236, for the Environment Protection Agency is \$3.991m, with the budget for 2006-07 of \$4.486m. Minister, is this the figure for the new Environment Protection Agency to operate with?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, no. I will go through part of it. Part of the \$495 000 is the increase of \$50 000 to the Cool Communities program and continuing the inclusion of the beverage industry funding of \$250 000 per annum. There is also the \$352 000, which is the transfer of the Aquatic Health Team to the EPA. There was an additional \$120 000, which was the Rapid Creek Environment Hub. Also, some of that was the decrease. I could refer this question to Clare Milikins, just to go through, because there was a reduction in one area and then an increase, like the Rapid Creek hub, which was part of our election commitment, if you wanted to get further clarification.

Ms MILIKINS: The Aquatic Health Team transferred from Natural Resource Management into the Environment Protection area as of 2006-07, so about \$352 000 of the increase relates to that unit transferring in. The \$120 000 that the minister mentioned for the Rapid Creek Environment Hub is in the 2006-07 budget. Those are the main components of the increase in funding. There was a slight increase in the Corporate Support costs allocated to that output that came with the transfer of the Aquatic Health Team to the unit. There is an offsetting decrease relating to grant funding that rolled over into 2005-06 from 2004-05 and is not in 2006-07.

Mrs MILLER: And that is why there is a substantial difference?

Ms MILIKINS: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Part of that was funding which - no that has improved, hasn't it - the DHAC funding even though it expires on 28 June. That was included, but that is an increase.

Mrs MILLER: Well, I just wanted to follow that on then, minister, with a departmental document from your department that is described as a budget impact statement. It is a subsection of your department that will become the EPA, hopefully. I am prepared to table that document. The total amount committed to that EPA on this budget impact statement is a bit worrying, because it has zero on it - it has nil on it, all the way across from 2005-06 to 2008-09. From what department will the funding come, minister, and what impact on the budget will that have, because this has nothing in it?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that budget impact statement supposed to be a departmental document, is it?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I am quite happy to table that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Well, if it is departmental, yes, I guess, you had better so the minister knows what you are talking about.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I got that, that was part of that ...

Mrs MILLER: It has nil on it.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I agree with you; it was part of the previous document that was put out that was being drafted, which we knew had been leaked, as I said, with the document that I was talking about previously, which I have and which was attached to the shadow minister's press release. I do not need that document. We made a commitment to fund the EPA and that commitment will be met.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: Minister, I believe that recently you advertised for legal people to work with the EPA. Is that correct?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This would be more operational. If you could just bear with me, member for Katherine, I will refer to the CEO. Did you say legal people for the EPA?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, to work with the EPA.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Is that legal services to be provided or ...

Mrs MILLER: Yes, to be employed by it, I was led to believe.

Dr RITCHIE: We are not advertising for legal staff for the EPA.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, I will get some evidence of that and talk to the minister about that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you any further questions in regard to that output, shadow minister?

Mrs MILLER: Oh, lots.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Next question?

Mrs MILLER: Is it the minister's intention to amalgamate the *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*, *Environmental Assessment Act* and *Water Act* into one prime piece of legislation and, if so, what impact assessment has been done as to the cost to industry and government?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In relation to the shadow minister's question, when we embarked on this exercise looking to establish an EPA, one of the exercises that was conducted prior to establishing an interim board and looking at the time frame for consultation, was that the EPA was asked to do an audit and assessment right across all our environmental legislation. That audit and assessment, as I understand, is finalised. There is a draft report that I have received and it is inches thick. You need to be a lawyer to understand all the bits and pieces of what this report states.

It is clear that there needs to be a number of pieces of legislation integrated under one Environment Protection Management Act. That was always, I suppose, one of the objectives that we wanted to achieve with that, when you have hundreds of pieces of legislation across a number of agencies that relate to environment protection, waste pollution, water, that you could bring together under one act. At the moment, nothing has come back to me apart from what I have received as part of the audit that has already been done and the assessment of that.

Mrs MILLER: So, you have received an assessment and you have ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have received a draft - only a draft - report of the departmental team that was looking across all the bits of legislation. It is very draft at this stage.

Mrs MILLER: I have many more questions to ask and I am running out of time, so I am going to skip a couple here in the interests of my colleagues here too. Minister, how many litres of material are pumped out through the poo shooter facility each day?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Is that solids or macerated stuff?

Mrs MILLER: How many litres per year go through the poo shooter?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Because part of that is with Power and Water Corporation and with ourselves, I will take that question on notice from the shadow minister and I will get back to her.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. Do you want me to repeat that?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, but I believe that seeing that it is going to *Hansard* and you want a proper answer, could we have the right name instead of your terms of endearment.

Mrs MILLER: Well, I actually think it has been formally recognised as a poo shooter.

Dr Lim: It is used by everybody, including the minister.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not think there is actually a poo shooter in the harbour. There might be some sort of sewage outlet. There might be some sort of three inch pipe.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is the Larrakeyah sewage outfall we are probably talking about.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If we could have it referred to as that so that we can get the right answer back.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Chairman, both the minister and I are on *Hansard* calling it the 'Larrakeyah poo shooter'. People understand what that is.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Let us just get on with it.

Mrs MILLER: Okay, my question is ...

Question on Notice

Mr CHAIRMAN: One moment please. For the purposes of *Hansard*, shadow minister, would you please repeat your question?

Mrs MILLER: How many litres of material are pumped out to the Larrakeyah facility, affectionately known as the poo shooter ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: By some.

Mrs MILLER: ... each day, and how many is that per year? Do the flows vary from day to day and, if so, how much can we expect on peak days?

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

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will.

Mr CHAIRMAN: For the purposes of *Hansard*, I allocate that question No 9.5.

Mrs MILLER: I have some other questions in relation to our favourite little topic of the week. In the interests of time running out, because I know that you have issued a media release this afternoon in relation to some of these questions, so they will be answered, I presume. What happens when the macerator breaks down? What role will the EPA have then when that macerator breaks down?

A member: Shovelling!

Mrs MILLER: No, seriously.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I will refer that question to the CEO of the department to, hopefully, attempt to answer that question for the shadow minister.

Dr RITCHIE: I will clarify an answer I gave before. I was referring to the EPA program, which I administer. The actual activities of the independent board is conducting are separate. In terms of our role, which is within the department at the moment, we have a role to issue discharge licences. As part of those discharge licences, there is a requirement on the licensee to monitor what they are doing and to ensure they are complying with the reporting requirements. Both the licence and their reports against those standards that we set have to be made public. In our case, our licence is on our web and the reports that are generated by, in this particular case, Power and Water Corporation, I understand, are on their website.

They are required to notify, because that is part of their licence, if there are any failures of equipment or any material changes to the circumstances under which the licence was issued. Our role, as the licensing agency, is to - if we are notified of anything material - then make a decision as to whether there are any steps we have to take in relation to the licence. The emphasis on all licences like that is to ensure that the licensee takes responsibility to ensure that we are notified and, hence the public is notified, in the event of material changes.

Mrs MILLER: With respect, minister, I do not know what happens when it breaks down. My question was: what happens when it breaks down?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I would assume that that is the responsibility of the Power and Water Corporation.

Dr RITCHIE: The Power and Water Corporation, in this instance, has a licence to discharge a certain type of discharge into the harbour at a particular point. If something changes materially to alter what they are doing- that is, if they are doing something different to what they are actually licensed to do - then they have to notify us. The actual details of how they manage that, as the minister says, I cannot answer; however, they have to manage that.

Mrs MILLER: So, in effect, there could be raw sewage pumping out into the harbour. They have to let you know within a 24-hour period, I would assume - they have to advise the EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If I could get the shadow minister to clarify. Are you talking about if the macerater was not working?

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: With the discharge going out of that outfall, if it is not working, yes, they are obligated to report that that is not working, and to rectify it, as I understand it. However, I will refer that to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: My answer before stands. For the actual details of how they manage that, we will have to go back to them, and we can do that.

Mrs MILLER: There is no defence in the *Liquor Act* - sorry, in the *Litter Act*, not the *Liquor Act*.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I was going to say, you have the wrong minister.

Mrs MILLER: It is getting to that time of day – *Litter Act* for littering by a government authority. This means that the government has a liability to dispose of its litter in the same way that all other Territorians do. Do you think that pumping plastic bags into the harbour is appropriate disposal of waste that does not offend the *Litter Act* and, if so, how is it different to somebody throwing plastic bags from a boat into the harbour?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We only have to look at the harbour and you see 100 boats going past. If you see someone on one of those boats throwing a plastic bag, there would be penalties which apply. I answered this in parliament last week, that if Power and Water have breached, or are found to have breached, their licence conditions in any way, there would be penalties. Penalties would apply like anyone else.

Mrs MILLER: The *Litter Act* would apply to them as well as anybody else?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Well, it is part of their licence conditions.

Mrs MILLER: Right. So what actually happens? Say, for instance ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is being looked at, at the moment. When I talked about this in parliament - I am not sure whether it was you or the member for Nelson who had asked that question - I stated that their licence is up for renewal at the end of July. As part of any negotiations for a renewal of their licence, we would look at the conditions of licence to cover some of the issues that have arisen out of this incident.

Mrs MILLER: I understand what you are saying, and I understood in parliament, of course; I listened to what you said about the licence. I understand that, but what happens when there are plastic bags and electric cables going through the shooter now that are really the responsibility of Power and Water to stop from going out into the harbour. How long does it take before that *Litter Act* is implemented? How long before they are infringing? How long before you get in touch with them to tell them they are infringing the *Litter Act*? Do you wait until the licence is to be renewed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I will refer that question to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: As you would appreciate, there have been some intense discussions between our officers and the Power and Water Corporation when an issue like this comes to our attention. The *Litter Act* is not the regulatory tool for dealing with this. In the first instance, we are talking to Power and Water Corporation about solving these problems at the source. They are very aware that there is a high level of community concern and that they do run the risk of breaching both their licence and other laws if they continue. The short answer is that the way that it is being dealt with is for Power and Water Corporation to address it at the source.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, are you considering, or re-considering CDL?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have not given any thought ...

Mr WOOD: I hope you have!

Ms SCRYMGOUR: ... in relation to CDL at this moment in time, shadow minister.

Mrs MILLER: Will you?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is not about whether I have a personal opinion one way or another. That is something on which government has made a decision. We have established a very good grants program, the Litter Abatement and Recovery Strategy. I believe that that is going pretty well. We have encouraged, through that strategy, voluntary CDL projects in some of our communities. There have been some responses from communities to look at that because, whilst I know for a long time there was a campaign and that Local Government and LGANT and many community government councils were certainly enthused about it and wanted it. I had those communities and those councils in my own electorate. However, when we went through the whole exercise, there were a number of unknowns, particularly cost factors, tax and other issues.

Having these voluntary programs happening through this grants program, I believe, will allow those communities - in particular those that were interested before and thought the introduction of CDL was going to be one way of reducing cans, and phase out cans in other areas and their community - to assist them to get at least some indication as to the cost and what would happen if you were to implement it. I do not think people thought - and I have had discussions with LGANT and some councils - that there are freight and other issues that have to be considered. I do not believe that that was properly costed out or looked at as part of that whole exercise when CDL was being considered.

Mrs MILLER: Could I encourage you not to take it off the agenda at all, because I walk most days in Katherine, and I pick up cans and drop them at the back door of one of our 'Keep Katherine Clean' ladies' houses, and they donate the money from that to charities once a year. It is appalling - it is absolutely appalling - the number of cans that I pick up every day, and I am just one person. I can only compare it with South Australia, where it is so darn clean, where they do not have cans or bottles. I encourage you, there has to be a way around it, a way through it. Our communities are filthy dirty. You only have to talk to the ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow minister, I was hoping for a preamble not a summation. You are starting ...

Mrs MILLER: No. It costs us a lot of money ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Community awareness also plays a big part and working with communities too. I agree with you.

Mrs MILLER: I really would like to see that. It definitely has to be considered. It is one of my little passions, too.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Shadow minister, do you have any more questions in regard to this output?

Mrs MILLER: Plenty.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Feel free.

Mrs MILLER: In regard to McArthur River, what was the cost of employing the scientist, Wayne Erskine, as a consultant, who wrote the now famous report into the proposed McArthur River rechannelling? Have there been ongoing costs associated with using this consultant again and again? If so, how much?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, I can clarify one thing in the shadow minister's question. The cost for Professor Wayne Erskine's consultancy was, I believe, approximately \$5390. Professor Erskine did not write the EPA's report; that report was done by the EPA. Professor Erskine was asked to provide expert independent advice in relation to geomorphological areas within the EIS document which was provided by Xstrata. He provided that advice to the EPA, based on the information supplied.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, what was the extra cost expended by government, given the minister's department's reassessment of the McArthur River proposed expansion? What was the extra cost extended to government?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am sorry, Mr Chairman, can the shadow minister please clarify her question? Extra costs? I gave her the cost of what that consultancy was for Professor Erskine's review or assessment of the report, and that was \$5390. I am not sure what the question is in terms of extra costs.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could you restate so the minister understands your question, please?

Mrs MILLER: When government has to go back and reassess now, after the mine has re-looked at their EIS and re-implemented and actioned it again, what cost is that going to be to government?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, we do not go back and reassess. We had gone through a process; that process had been completed. That then went to the next step of the process with my recommendations to the Minister for Mines and Energy. He then did his assessment and made a number of determinations. That came back to me; we entered into a whole new assessment process. There was no re-assessment. It is a whole new assessment process that we went back to.

Mrs MILLER: Okay. So, both processes cost \$5390, is that right?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No, when the determination is done of MIM or Xstrata - whether it is an EIS or a PER, in this second round that we are on now - it was determined that they would conduct the PER. It would be at the level of a PER. They are now going through that process. The cost of that is not the department's, because that PER is the proponent's. They do that, not the department. The department's cost is absorbed when we have the different people within our agencies. I will refer the second part of that to the CEO in terms of within the department.

Dr RITCHIE: To pick up your point, I gathered you wanted to know what was the cost of Wayne Erskine's involvement. That is the basic external expertise we are buying in for the process. As the minister says, the company submitted a new proposal, which is in the process, just lodged now. They asked whether we could provide assistance to them from some of the experts we have used. One of those was Wayne Erskine. We have paid for him to meet regularly with the company's environmental consultants. We estimate that the total of that will come to approximately \$24 000, which includes everything from airfares to accommodation and all that sort of thing. A lot of that takes place outside of the Northern Territory, so it will include flying him up to Brisbane.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, are you aware of the extra cost to this company in having to redo a whole lot of environmental planning for the proposed expansion? Is there any compensation to the company from government's actions?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: This is a long, winding saga. No compensation. A company puts in a proposal to do a development, whether it is an expansion of an existing mine or whatever. It is up to that proponent, or that developer, to convince government that their project or their proposal meets environmental standards and, in this case, environmental standards which is part of my responsibility. If the proposal does not meet that well, then, it is not up to the government, or for me as the minister, to change their proposal. It is an assessment process. They submit a proposal, we assess. It is a complete assessment process. That is the risk that they take. It is up to proponents or developers to get it right. It is not up to me, as the minister, or to government to tell them to get it right, because otherwise you corrupt the whole system. It is an assessment process, and it is an assessment of the adequacy of information submitted by proponents and decisions are made accordingly to that.

Mrs MILLER: How much time do I have?

Mr CHAIRMAN: You have all the time you want. You have until 6.05 pm, I believe.

Mrs MILLER: I will ask one more. Do you have some questions?

Mr WOOD: Oh, I have.

Mrs MILLER: Does the minister intend to ensure that all government owned assets and instrumentalities are operating to best practice and standards? If not, what costs will be incurred to bringing them up to best practice standards? In other words, who will you go to first with your new EPA - industry that does not comply with legislation or government that does not?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Everyone. Shadow minister, everyone has to comply with environmental protection laws. Government is no different. It should apply to everyone. Has that answered your question?

Mrs MILLER: Yes.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: It is not just about chasing industry with a big stick; it is about having in place good environment protection management systems.

Mrs MILLER: Just as long as you ensure that government authorities meet those standards as well. So, the EPA will investigate government facilities as well?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If it is within the charter of the EPA, yes, they would have to.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mrs MILLER: I have, but in the interests of being a good person ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was never in doubt, shadow minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: If the shadow minister has more questions, the member for Nelson should allow her to ask her questions.

Mr WOOD: The member for Nelson has been mentioned so many times this evening without even asking a question; I wonder why I bother asking, but I will.

Minister, in respect of the EPA; this book, dated May 2006, has been included in the workshops and has a foreword by Professor Gordon Duff. In the foreword, he is talking about the establishment of an independent Environment Protection Agency. He says:

Its form and function will be based on consultation.

Minister, if I was a person who had just arrived from Mars and I read that, would I presume no EPA at the present time existed?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Given that there is no life on Mars; however, minister, if you wish to answer, please go ahead.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In answer to the member for Nelson's question, we have gone through this before. Do you remember the famous diagram? I tabled it in parliament especially for you, member for Nelson, when we were having the discussion about the EPA. That diagram stated that it is an EPA program within NRETA and that is why we drew up the diagram and tabled it for you to look at.

Mr WOOD: Minister, on 19 October 2005 in your media release, you said:

The EPA will now take on most of the functions of a former Office of Environment and Heritage.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, they have.

Mr WOOD: Minister, again, if I had arrived from Mars, would I presume that you have already presumed what the EPA will look like because you are now putting the functions of NRETA into an EPA?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The Office of Environment and Heritage was a division within a bigger agency. It was in DIPE. OEH then took on the form of the EPA program.

Mr WOOD: Could you explain what an 'EPA program' means?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I do not have that diagram. The EPA program oversees and implements and is charged with environment protection legislation that we have in place at the moment.

Mr WOOD: But there was nothing to explain - and you made a statement in parliament that the EPA program will support the EPA board. In every person's language, 'EPA program' does not mean anything. Is it government speak? What is it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The EPA is part of the agency; it is the program. There are water quality people and there are the waste pollution people. I will go through it for you. Under the Director for Environment - maybe if I tabled this for you, member for Nelson, you can see what that whole program involves in terms of the EPA.

Mr WOOD: Minister, what I am getting at - and I am trying to keep it in a simplistic form - is that the government said it will establish an EPA. It then has an interim board whose role it is to do these workshops. The last one in Darwin is on tonight ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: And consultations, yes.

Mr WOOD: ... and people would imagine the EPA has not been established because you are spending money on more workshops. I know you made a comment before about the member for Nelson complaining about consultation. You can say what you like but ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: You growled about ...

Mr WOOD: ... this is the second round of consultation. Most people would expect the Environment Protection Agency not to exist at the present time. Otherwise, why would you be having workshops now if it does exist?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We do have an Environment Protection Agency. Member for Nelson, you have constantly bleated about it so I have referred back to you in relation to it because you are the one who has gone around saying it, not me. There is an EPA, which is the Environment Protection Agency, which was the former Office of Environment and Heritage.

Mr WOOD: Yes, I can see why people are confused. Minister ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I think you are the only one who is confused.

Mr WOOD: Minister, there is the document, which is an environmental assessment report for McArthur River mine open cut project signed by the EPA. Yet, an EPA, at the present time, has not been formed. You have Professor Gordon Duff asking members of the public what kind of form and function in an EPA they would like.

Mr CHAIRMAN: What is the question member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: How can you expect the public to believe you have not predetermined what your EPA will look like?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The member Nelson was an active member of the sessional committee that went on these visits throughout Australia to talk to various government agencies, non-government organisations, and different people, looking at various structures in Australia about what an EPA would look like. There is nothing wrong with government establishing, within its own agency, an Environment Protection Agency, and we have done that. That does not take away from our commitment to having an independent EPA within the agency. The EPA is about the program, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: Yes ...

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I have received very little feedback from people complaining. Travelling throughout the Northern Territory with different groups and when we have had Community Cabinet where you meet with a number of groups, people do talk about the EPA. However, I can tell you it has not been raised with me, member for Nelson, that anyone is confused about the EPA.

Mr WOOD: Thank you, minister. I remind you that the committee that went interstate also had consultation with the public and industry up and down the track. If you think that I am out of order saying, 'Why have more consultations?', I am saying that we had the consultations and we came up with three models, yet, you are asking people to do it again. It is a fair question to ask: are we not doubling up?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: But we are not.

Mr WOOD: Minister, the assessment by the committee that there should be four models is, unfortunately, not in this document. Why did the government not give people the option of seeing the four models that the sessional committee proposed?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I defer to the CEO.

Dr RITCHIE: As a department, we received the sessional committee's report and it established a number of parameters. That was considered by Cabinet. We were then asked to settle a number of other very key questions that were not settled in that report. I guess the most important one of those is what are the role and functions that an EPA would perform and what level of authority they would have over other areas of government and decision-making. To that extent, it is a case of us going back to the community and, in particular industry, to get a very clear idea about the functions of an EPA and, from that then flows the form.

The various models about the form - in other words, where you draw lines and who provides administrative support - in a sense fall out of this round of community consultation to which everyone is invited to at Charles Darwin University at 7 pm where we have another community consultation happening this evening. The essential questions that are not answered in the sessional committee's report are exactly the bounds of responsibility and function of an EPA.

Mr WOOD: Thank you. Minister, I accept what the CEO has said but, to provide a proposed structure - I am sure where that came from; 'proposed' to me sounds like this is the one we are proposing - without giving the options that a government committee put together is, to some extent, thumbing one's nose at the work that the committee did. I would have thought the public would have had the right at least to have looked at those. Whether they agreed with them or not is irrelevant but, in a workshop form, I would have thought that was a fair approach. I am disappointed that, at least if we are going down this road, that the public could not have an opportunity to look at those.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Have you a question, member for Nelson?

Mr WOOD: All right, just one other question. I want to be clear in my head exactly what the role of the workshops are. This is the advertisement in the paper for the workshops and it says:

The Independent Environment Protection Agency Board invites Territorians to have a say in the future role ...

Not what it says at the front page of the document, which is:

Its form and function will be based on consultation.

There is a vast difference. You can work out what the role is, and I would expect the role to be like one of the forms of an EPA that we have seen in other states. However, but how is it made up - its form - that is critical to its independence. Having seen this advertisement, I ask the minister is the workshop to look at both the function and the form? That is not what it says in the advertisement.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: The shadow minister was asking a series of questions when the session opened. Member for Nelson, you are asking more or less the same questions that the shadow minister has asked ...

Dr LIM: That is right. We did not get a good answer.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is what I said. Member for Greatorex, no one asked you. I am attempting to answer the member for Nelson's question.

Dr LIM: I am talking to my colleague.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: That is part of the workshops, discussions and consultations, member for Nelson, to look at. I did say in answer to one of the shadow minister's questions that will be the final form and function of a Territory EPA.

Mr WOOD: My last question on this subject, minister. Now that you have explained that you are having two EPAs – (1) as part of your department and (2) as an independent EPA - would it be fair to say by setting up something in that manner, the public will be confused?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Mr Chairman, the member for Nelson is being facetious. I did not say we will be having two EPAs. I have tried to make it clear in a number of discussions or questions that we have had in parliament and motions that have been brought against me in relation to MRM and the actions of the EPA. As I said, talking to people in the general public, no one is confused. The confusion is with the member for Nelson. We have made it very clear ...

Dr Lim interjecting.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: He just said that I was saying that we were having two EPAs. I have never said we will have two EPAs. We have an EPA program that is a program within a greater agency, member for Nelson.

Mr WOOD: It does not say program on McArthur River.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson. Have you concluded your remarks, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not know how to tell you this, minister, but that is the end of the session. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister attending today and also those officers who provided advice. Yes, minister?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I am sorry, Mr Chairman. There were some questions taken on notice during the course of estimates and I do have ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: Do you wish to table those?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: I could table that. There are responses to questions on notice Nos 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3.

Dr LIM: You were going to give me an answer to a question too, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No 9.1 was the Joint Management Programs for 2005-06 and 2006-07.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That was for the member for Greatorex.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: No 9.2 was Howard Springs.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Nelson.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Then the total budget for wildlife. I am not sure what output that was in relation to, but the total budget was \$6.65m, but I will table that. That is across the whole Biodiversity Conservation Division.

I am not sure what the output numbers were, but I think it was the shadow minister who asked for clearing applications that have been received and approved in the Katherine and Daly regions in 2005-06.

Mrs MILLER: That is right.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In Katherine, nine have been received, seven had been issued, one deferred for further assessment and one is being assessed now. That is the current status.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I note that that was not a question on notice, but one that you did say that you would get back to us with. Thank you, minister.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: In the Daly region, one has been received, but none issued at the moment. In Katherine water licensed stations for 2005-06, six groundwater licences have been issued and about 46 are pending.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is a question on notice No 9.3, isn't it?

Ms SCRYMGOUR: Yes, that was the last one she asked, the groundwater. For surface water licences, seven were issued and there are about four pending.

Mrs MILLER: Right. Thank you.

Ms SCRYMGOUR: We can table all of these.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you everyone. Thanks for attending.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER McADAM'S PORTFOLIOS

DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT, HOUSING AND SPORT

Mr CHAIRMAN: Good evening, everyone. We will be out of here in four-and-a-half hours, everything going well. I welcome the minister and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport.

Mr McADAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I also acknowledge other members of the committee. I am here today to answer questions from the committee in respect of my portfolio areas. I am here with Mr Mike Dillon on my right, Chief Executive Officer of my Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. Mr Dillon is also the Chief Executive of Housing, with responsibility for Territory Housing, otherwise known as a GBD. On my far right is Mr Steve Rossingh, Executive Director Corporate Services, who is responsible for financial management in the department. On my left is Mr Nick Scarvelis, Executive Director Local Government.

I will be inviting executive directors from my department to join me as I believe appropriate to the committee's deliberations. Later in the evening, I will be joined by the Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority when the committee considers the appropriation to that authority.

The Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport is responsible for the delivery of the government's program in sports and recreation. My colleague, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, has carriage of this appropriation and will answer questions tomorrow morning. Sport and Recreation is a separate output group within the budget and there is no cross-over of costs or budgets with the other output groups. Consequently, the Sport and Recreation portfolio can be excluded without impact on the other functions of the department in the context of these hearings.

The Corporate Services Division provides a service across the whole agency. I will answer questions in regard to the scope of capital works in my program. My colleague, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, will answer questions in regard to contractual details of capital works contracts for indigenous housing administered by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

The 2006-07 Budget provides a firm base to consolidate substantial progress made over the last five years in advancing the wellbeing of Territorians, and I am particularly proud of the significant achievements that have been made and are planned for the future within my own portfolio responsibilities. The budget paper identifies 18 strategic issues facing my department, Territory Housing, in 2006-07. Each and every one of these issues will be the subject of a sustained policy focus and encompass appropriate resource allocations, both within the agency and, importantly, in service delivery to the community as a whole over the coming financial year.

The appearance of a reduction in budget allocation between 2005-06 and 2006-07 can be attributed to one-off additional projects and programs undertaken during 2005-06 which are not expected to be experienced in 2006-07.

Governance: building on the successful approach taken in the Gulf region, Tiwi Islands and Mutitjulu where departmental officers live and work in the community, five additional development coordinators were appointed in 2005-06 pursuant to the Bilateral Overarching Agreement on Indigenous Affairs. This brings the total to nine development coordinators in the Northern Territory. Each development coordinator is responsible for a particular region, and is generally located in a remote community where they are able to build strong relationships with the local people. Officers are now based in Thamarrurr, Tiwi Islands, East Arnhem, Groote Eylandt, Nyirranggulung, Southern Barkly, Victoria River and Mutitjulu regions. The primary objective of these officers is to implement complex whole-of-government, whole-of-community governance and development projects with communities in the region.

The present system of local government is not working in remote areas and is jeopardising the success of many programs that are aimed at improving outcomes for indigenous people. Significant resources are being expended in trying to maintain the current ineffective system and, without radical change, this will continue to be to the detriment of communities across the Northern Territory. Fundamental reform of local government in the Northern Territory is the single most important initiative that could facilitate improved social and economic development at the local and regional level, and a primary focus of the government's output brief during 2006-07 will be a consideration of options for reform.

Since the introduction of swimming pool fencing legislation and the Under 5 Water Safety Awareness Program, no children under five years of age have drowned in private swimming pools in the Northern Territory. I am pleased to report that the Northern Territory has turned around from having the worst under 5 drowning record in Australia to having the best.

Indigenous Services: for the past few years we have experienced problems in fully expending the indigenous housing funding allocations under the construction program. Much of this can be attributed to a lack of management capacity of some indigenous community housing organisations to roll out construction projects. Significant inroads have been made during 2005-06 to improving delivery methods within the construction program and, whilst it is projected that there will be a construction program under-expenditure of some \$2.3m at the end of this financial year which is committed partially to completed projects, this represents a considerable improvement, especially considering that \$18.3m was carried over into 2005-06.

The limited capacities of some indigenous community housing organisations is not only evident in the management of construction projects, but there has been ongoing concern with the performance of some organisations in providing adequate housing management services in their communities. Residents of remote communities, in many cases, are the recipients of poor housing conditions, inequitable rental practices and little tenancy support. In recognition of this, the government recently announced its intention to expand public housing to the remote communities and, ultimately, ensure that remote indigenous people have access to similar services provided to public housing tenants in towns. While this strategy will take some time to implement, my department will continue to work with indigenous housing organisations to improve their capacity to deliver quality services and improve the likelihood of their continued involvement in housing services into the future.

As part of the Australian government budget 2006-07, the Attorney-General, Hon Philip Ruddock MP, announced a four-year extension of \$1.5m to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service. The interpreter service, which has been jointly funded by the Australian and the Northern Territory governments

since 2000, provides services to indigenous Australians who speak little or no English and would otherwise face considerable difficulties obtaining access to government and community services.

Libraries: as one of the Territory's iconic cultural institutions and by its very location at Parliament House, the Northern Territory Library is a well visited destination for both Territorians and tourists alike. The number of people who paid a visit to the Northern Territory Library was in excess of 17 000 in the lead-up to the end of financial year 2005-06, up 34% on the previous year. Due to the increase in visitors, this government will strengthen its commitment to public libraries, including libraries and knowledge centres in remote Northern Territory communities, by increasing funding to almost \$3.2m in 2006-07.

Territory Housing: I am pleased to report that the 2005-06 budget year represents Territory Housing's fifth straight year of financial improvement. Importantly, this has been achieved without the reduction of services or impeding the delivery of government social housing objectives. To put this in perspective, Territory Housing's losses have reduced from \$17.9m in 2001-02 to an estimated loss of \$5.3m in 2005-06 and this trend is expected to continue in 2006-07.

In achievements during 2005-06, Territory Housing has increased security patrols across the Territory at a cost of \$762 000 and has funded four indigenous community liaison positions in an effort to reduce the incidence of antisocial behaviour in public housing. Territory Housing will continue to take a strong approach to noise, nuisance and antisocial behaviour in public housing in 2006-07 by: increasing funding for security patrols to \$800 000; introducing several behaviour agreements; continued support for indigenous clients through the indigenous community liaison positions; and the provision of funding for indigenous and community organisations to provide supported accommodation, tenancy support and life skills programs. A total of \$4m will be directly provided to target a reduction in antisocial behaviour and tenancy support, and much more will be expanded through mainstream tenancy support initiatives.

Following the tragic death of a young girl in Tennant Creek in March 2005, a safety audit of evaporative airconditioners installed in public housing dwellings in the Central Australian region has been conducted at a cost of \$145 000. As a result of the audit, certificates of compliance have been issued for evaporative airconditioners in all public housing dwellings in Tennant Creek and Elliott. Of the 1062 dwellings with evaporative airconditioners installed in Alice Springs and Ti Tree, 85% have been issued with full compliance certificates. Territory Housing has sent letters to the remaining households to resolve access issues.

Territory Housing has also implemented internal procedures to more effectively monitor provision of maintenance services. The current unrest at Wadeye has resulted in the Northern Territory Police needing to urgently increase their presence within the community. Territory Housing will be constructing two-bedroom duplexes for NT Police at a cost of \$1.1m. It is anticipated that this project will be completed in December 2006. Territory Housing will be providing interim demountable accommodation in the near future until the permanent building is completed.

This government continues to increase its support for home ownership in the Northern Territory. Demands for loans under the HomeNorth Extra Scheme have exceeded expectations, with more than 940 Territory households benefiting from the revamped scheme since July 2004. In excess of \$140m in loans have been funded and approved in principle since the revised scheme began. You will agree, Mr Chairman, it is a very good result. A significant proportion of these loans continue to be provided to first home buyers, with 64% of people taking up HomeNorth Extra loans being below 35 years of age.

In the area of government employee housing, Territory Housing has built 54 houses at a cost \$19m to support the delivery of core government services to both indigenous and non-indigenous Territorians in the remote regions of the Territory, and that occurred during 2005-06.

In summary, Mr Chairman, my department covers an extremely wide range of responsibilities and is strongly committed to delivering exemplary services to all Territorians, whether in urban or remote areas, to enable them to develop into strong, self-reliant communities.

Relevant officers from across the agency are here to assist in answering the committee's questions and, of course, Mr Chairman, where necessary, I will take questions on notice to ensure the committee receives up-to-date and accurate information. Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister. Are there any questions in regard to the opening statement? That being the case, the committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2006-07 as they relate to the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – GOVERNANCE
Output 1.1 - Local Governance and Community Development.

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Governance, Output 1.1, Local Governance and Community Development.

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, I wonder if the minister would comment on this for me: in the *Weekend Australian* of 17 June 2006, the Chief Minister blamed self-determination for the problems in the remote Aboriginal communities. She said:

The biggest cause of where we are now is that we said to small Aboriginal communities in remote parts of Australia and the Territory could manage their own affairs, she told the Weekend Australian.

You wouldn't tell my suburb to manage its own affairs. If you said to the Narrows, where I live, you do your own rates and rubbish and run the store and it would fail.

If this is what the Chief Minister feels, how do you think your government feels about our bush communities?

Mr MCADAM: How do I feel about bush communities, or how does our government feel?

Dr LIM: You are the minister and, therefore, you are the government. If your Chief Minister feels that the Narrows should not be responsible for rates, rubbish and running a store and she believes that the Narrows would fail, does that, therefore, reflect to the government's attitude; that you expect bush communities to fail?

Mr McADAM: No, not at all, member for Grotorex. I do not think that is the position put by the Chief Minister at all. Perhaps you may be misrepresenting precisely what she refers to. It is very clear that the Chief Minister was alluding to the fact that there are many indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory and a lot of those communities over a very long period of time have been asked to carry out functions which they have, basically, been unprepared to do.

It is something I have stated over quite a long period of time regarding those communities; they have been expected to carry out issues to do with education, police, law and order, and a whole host of others which would not be expected of a similar sized non-indigenous community or, indeed, a suburb throughout the Northern Territory or other parts of Australia.

I believe what the Chief Minister was referring to there was that the challenge is for government - not only us as the Northern Territory government, but the Commonwealth government as well – in how we redirect or focus our approach to those communities out there. It is something we recognise. Over a period of time, it slowly dawned on us that it is a case of sometimes governments of whatever persuasion, at either the Northern Territory or Commonwealth level, have sat back and become very comfortable and, basically, said to those communities, particularly the councils, 'It is your responsibility, you fix it' without giving the those communities adequate support resources and the appropriate backup to effectively deal with the many issues people face out there. What the Chief Minister is saying is that we have to change how we provide not only services, but ongoing support to those councils which, quite frankly, are under big stress. Times have changed over a long period of time, as you would be aware.

We are dealing with a whole range of issues, particularly in communities that are closer to the larger regional centres where you have the impact of grog, ganga, and law and order issues which were not there in the past. Yet, we continue to say to these communities through their Night Patrol programs or other such support type agencies: 'You fix it'. The bottom line is the expectations are too much for those communities and we have to, as I said, refocus how we do it. I think that is what the Chief Minister was saying.

Dr LIM: Minister, I sympathise with you and I support much of your comment about our expectations of community government councils and what they are expected to do out there with scant resources. In fact, I recall a program which started five or six years ago where the Office of Local Government was going to assist community government councils by representing them to negotiate with Northern Territory government agencies to ensure that adequate resources are provided by those agencies for the community government councils to run programs such as power and water, health and all those services that, for some reason or other, community government councils have to pick up. Local Government was going to negotiate with agencies to make sure that adequate funding was provided to community government councils. How has that program gone?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, to give you an example, the Tiwi Local Government Council deals with 37 more functions than would be expected of the Darwin City Council, which gives you an idea of the expectation that applies in respect to an indigenous local government council and that of a larger council.

You will be aware, over a period of time, that we have had community development officers attached to the regions throughout the Northern Territory who provide a role of supporting communities. We have had, of late, the appointment of nine development coordinators. During the course of my opening statement, I indicated where they would be based across the regions. They will continue to play an important role.

I am going to ask Mr Nick Scarvelis to give you some more details on a more micro-level in a moment if you do not mind. However, it is important to understand that things have changed, particularly since the demise of ATSIC. You now have ICC and, effectively, you have mainstream agencies working under the ICC in the Northern Territory and across Australia. I have said before publicly that we have to put in place something that re-engages the provision of service delivery from the Commonwealth quite apart from ourselves.

That is the challenge. I do not mean this as a criticism, but I have visited something like 20 indigenous communities over the last seven to eight months, and almost without exception, quite apart from the housing and all those sort of issues, one of the biggest issues that comes up is that there appears to be a lack of coordination in some of the Commonwealth programs in the past and they have reverted to the SRA-type stuff, which I do not disagree with. However, the point is that the challenge is there for both governments to really refocus those positions.

The other thing I want to say is that probably too often in the past - and, again, I am not putting the blame anywhere here; it is successive governments both at the national and Territory level - quite often, the majority of time is spent out there reviewing indigenous organisations or communities. We were out there reviewing and evaluating them all the time. The thing we fail to do is evaluate or review the interaction between the Northern Territory government and the Commonwealth government. You often heard it, over the last six weeks in particular. That is something I would like to focus on, particularly in regard to the regional development positions. If I may, I will ask ...

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, if I can address the minister? Minister, I do not think I want to go into the micro issues because we have limited time. You and I should be dwelling on the macro issues and we can come to a briefing for the finer detail. Minister, we have about 66 or 63 community government councils. Am I right?

Mr McADAM: Fifty-six community government councils and the other six are municipal councils.

Mrs BRAHAM: Does that include the big amalgamated one?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling!

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I would like to keep it going like this.

Dr LIM: Can we have the numbers again?

Mr SCARVELIS: Nick Scarvelis, Chief Executive, Local Government. There are 30 community government councils established under the *Local Government Act*, 26 councils that are established under the *Associations Act* and there are seven other councils that we refer to as municipal councils, and that includes Jabiru.

Dr LIM: You mentioned earlier that you have visited some 20 communities in the last six to nine months ...

Mr McADAM: About 20.

Dr LIM: ... and found them to be not functioning very well.

Mr McADAM: I did not say that.

Dr LIM: Well, they need help.

Mr McADAM: No, I did not say anything about them not functioning or being dysfunctional.

Dr LIM: Following your observations from the visits, have you sought an order or a risk analysis of these communities to see how well they are stacking up?

Mr McADAM: Specifically in respect to the 20, I am certain some of those 20 would have been part of the compliance audit; the risk analysis that we do. The risk analysis occurs on an ongoing basis. As communities come to our attention, they warrant further analysis. They are a lot more in-depth analyses of some of the issues that might be arising. But if I can, member for Braitling, the risk assessment ...

Dr LIM: I am not Braitling, I am Greatorex.

Mr McADAM: Sorry, Greatorex, I beg your pardon. For risk assessments in 2005-06, risk outcomes – I will also give you figures in respect of 2006-07 – it was calculated that 5% were classified as dysfunctional; 42% at high risk; 46% at moderate risk; and 6% at low risk. Data in respect of 2006-07, the coming year is: dysfunctional - 11%; high risk - 38%; moderate risk - 37%; and low risk - 14%. Do you want a definition in terms of 'dysfunctional high risk'? I am sure Mr Scarvelis would be happy to provide that.

Dr LIM: Minister, would you be happy to table the document? When you ran off for 2005-06, you have 5%, 40%, 46% and 6%, which adds up to well past 100%. I am not sure how the sums work, unless I heard wrongly.

Mr McADAM: 42%, 46%, that is 88%. No, the first one is right, that is 100%.

Dr LIM: So it is 5%, 40% ...

Mr McADAM: 5%, 42%, 46%, 7%.

Dr LIM: Sorry 5%, 42% ...

Mr McADAM: 5%, 42%, 46%, 7%. That is 100%. Then in the second set, it is 11%, 38%, 37%, 14% and that adds up to 100% if my arithmetic is right.

Dr LIM: 5%, 42%, 46% and 7%. My mistake, sorry.

Mr CHAIRMAN: You are tabling that document, minister?

Mr McADAM: Yes, I am.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Thank you, minister.

Dr LIM: When you earlier mentioned the nine development coordinators, you are not concentrating them on the communities that are at high risk or even moderate high risk to ensure that they are supported well? If they are dysfunctional, it takes a lot of work to try to pull them together. Are you not concentrating your resources on those you can rescue?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, I will ask Mr Scarvelis to answer that in more detail.

Mr SCARVELIS: Some positions are focusing on communities that are at high risk; for instance, the Mutitjulu position and we are currently interviewing for a position to go into the Papunya broader region. Some of the other development coordinators, as distinct from the community development officers, are actually going to those regions where there has been a community of interest identifying itself as being a region of the future, so a larger local government in the future. That program is about not being reactive, but being proactive towards the development of the type of local government to which we would all aspire.

There has been a deliberate decision that some of those positions are being placed in regions where the establishment of new local government bodies is likely to happen, and you will notice that the three regional authorities that have already been established have development coordinators attached them. That was by agreement with the Australian government, that they should each have a position, and their major focus is about whole-of-government coordination and the development of regional partnership agreements rather than shared responsibility agreements. It is somewhat a more proactive approach using the development coordinators. They also, we should note, are at a higher level than the community development officers

who work with the compliance branch, who then work more on those communities that are struggling and need individual support.

Dr LIM: Minister, with the risk assessment, you have definitions of what low, moderate, high risk and dysfunctional means. Are you prepared to table those definitions?

Mr SCARVELIS: They are somewhat subjective in that they are a guide for our department in order that we can then develop a strategy to provide assistance. It ranges from the dysfunction where there has been either an inability for the community to progress or a major irregularity, through to councils that, without any real support, will progress without our support. The benchmark for that, I guess, is we use the municipal councils which do not actually have a regulatory process and we pursue with them other than the basic, ensuring that we see their business plans, estimates, and quarterly reports. However, for general purposes of the extent to which they are complying, they are self-regulatory.

Dr LIM: Minister, that does not explain to me what 'moderate risk' is for a community government council. If it is subjective, that makes it more difficult to conceptualise it. If someone walks into a bush community from another place in Australia, he would not be able to tell whether this community is functioning well or not and would have to make a subjective decision. There must be some criteria that you would use to advise all your auditors or assessors whether a community is doing okay or not?

Mr McADAM: Could I ask Mr Dillon to respond?

Mr DILLON: Mike Dillon, Chief Executive Officer. Thank you, minister. There are four categories, Dr Lim, and they are pretty much commonsense. They are not totally subjective because they are based on a risk assessment or analysis where there is a *pro forma*. Officers go into the community and go through that *pro forma*. They ask detailed questions against that *pro forma*, which is designed to assess, basically, the health of the community just as you as a medical doctor would do an examination of a patient and you have in your head a sort of a *pro forma* of the sort of things to look for – blood pressure, pulse, etcetera. We do that exercise.

We do not have specific definitions, but clearly 'dysfunctional' are communities where they have hit rock bottom and need external intervention; 'high risk' are communities where they have not quite reached that point, but we believe that there is a serious risk that they could go over the edge; 'moderate risk' is communities that are in the level; and 'low risk' are communities that seem to be going well and are within the normal range of healthy activities. So, it is not totally subjective, but nor is there a watertight or statutory definition that we are applying in these situations.

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister, for your CEO'S explanation. I will accept that, but I would not analogise that with a medical assessment because that is more science than art. Anyway, with community governance, minister, we are seeing that there are significant numbers of councils that are at risk. I see that the support in financial allocations has decreased somewhat. Can you explain that? You are some \$1.1m ...

Mr McADAM: \$1.6m.

Dr LIM: ... \$1.5m, \$1.6m short.

Mr McADAM: The actual budget papers, I think, will show a figure of \$2m ...

Dr LIM: Minister, if I could refer you to page 256 of Budget Paper No 3. For 2005-06, your estimate is \$45.78m and this coming year you are forecasting only \$44.61m in community grants.

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, the figures that you refer to relate to grants. There is a Regional Authorities Bilateral Agreement, which is a figure of \$1.6m and, of course, the CPI on financial assistance.

Dr LIM: Where is that shown in the budget paper, minister?

Mr McADAM: Mr Dillon might be able to clarify that.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, the table you are referring to is performance measures for governance of local government/community development area. The performance measure relates to grants distributed. You are correct; there is a projected decrease there of just over \$1m. The reason for that particular decrease relates to the fact that we are yet to receive the indexation on our FAGs allocated for the coming financial

year; therefore, we have not been able to put those into estimated grants for next year. We just do not know what the figure is.

Dr LIM: Minister, are you anticipating that you will have an increase in your FAGs and, therefore, will then have your final figure for 2006-07 to be something in the order of another \$1.5m? If it is CPI of 3% ...

Mr McADAM: My advice, member for Greatorex, is yes, there is expected to an increase; something in the order of around about \$2m, we anticipate.

Dr LIM: I accept that, minister, and that brings it up to about \$46m which, essentially, it is line ball. So, the community councils are going to get more indexation or more CPI increase for their operations. The amount you have for this year will come to an end. Next year, FAGs indexation only brings it to line ball which means they are going backwards, are they not?

Mr McADAM: No, I do not necessarily agree they are going backwards. You have described, basically, the same amount of money. My advice is that the increase of \$2m which will occur as a result of the CPI increase and that should effectively give us an extra \$1m for extra governance input. The other thing, which I referred to earlier, is that there is a challenge for this government to start engaging with the Commonwealth government on this issue with the regional development coordinators. My own personal belief is that if we look at a more streamlined and coordinated response in those development coordinators, we are actually adding to it as well.

Dr LIM: Okay. Minister, the development coordinators - for instance the one working at Mutitjulu or anywhere else - do they come under your direct control or do they work towards the federal government?

Mr McADAM: The advice I have is that we manage to program on behalf of the Commonwealth but, of course, the functions and duties are jointly between ourselves and that of the Commonwealth.

Dr LIM: So there are reporting responsibilities to our Officer of Local Government?

Mr McADAM: Yes.

Dr LIM: Minister, I saw your *Four Corners* interview regarding Imanpa when you expressed concerns for the community. So would I. Did the development coordinator of Mutitjulu have any responsibility for Imanpa as well? Is that part of his region?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, my understanding is no because the new position has just recently been appointed, but I ask Mr Dillon to give you more details in respect of that role based at Mutitjulu.

Dr LIM: If I can clarify one issue that you mentioned before Mr Dillon explains. I thought the government coordinators had been there for at least a year already, if not even longer.

Mr McADAM: Again, I ask Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. There has been a jointly-funded position. Originally, it was with the Office of Indigenous Policy in the Chief Minister's Department and there was a jointly-funded project officer there. That officer left and there was a small gap, and our development coordinator has now recently gone into play a couple of months ago.

The point to make here is that the work those two officers have done reporting to both governments has been focused on broad community development in the community and examining options to improve governance in the community. It is worth noting, however, that Mutitjulu is not one of the community government councils under our *Local Government Act*, so it does not really come under the local government program.

Mr McADAM: If I may add, member for Greatorex, it comes back to the point that I raised of how you engage with the Commonwealth about development coordinators. Mutitjulu is also a community that has some difficulties from time to time. It is subject to the Commonwealth, but there is a possibility that we can approach the Commonwealth regarding some input for that position into Imanpa. It goes back to the point I raised, which is how we utilise existing resources.

Dr LIM: Sure. Again, you have my sympathies, minister. Please do not get me wrong; I want to see this community succeed as much as you do. What disturbed me about that program was that there was no evident local government input or support in that ABC *Four Corners* program. We saw you, Commonwealth officers, private enterprise and the only body that was missing was local government. If local government was there, it was not portrayed on the program. Can you assure me that local government was, indeed, there trying to support Imanpa?

Mr McADAM: Dr Lim, I want to assure you that, at the time of the *Four Corners* program and, indeed, prior to it, I received reports on some of the issues that were happening at Imanpa. I want to assure you that there was continual oversight from the regional manager in Alice Springs and, indeed, some of the staff in Alice Springs. The expectation was for that to occur because we provided funding in housing, under the housing component, which is the R&M and the management component, but the same also applied in regards to local government. We also provided some dollars. I do not have the exact figures, but they are significant in the context of the overall allocation to Imanpa. I want to assure you that there was continual surveillance of Imanpa. It is probably not wise to base one's observations on a program because, for the 30 seconds that I spoke on that program, I was interviewed for something like 20-odd minutes. The point that I want to make is that - and I come back to it because it is important to understand - it is not a blaming exercise. I could ask you the same question in a way; you were minister at one time in regard to Imanpa.

Dr LIM: That is right. I visited Imanpa at least twice in that last year before the change of government. At the time when I was visiting Imanpa, it was quite a well-functioning community with a large population. I wonder if Imanpa is one of the 5% dysfunctional communities you mentioned earlier?

Mr McADAM: Yes, I can confirm that Imanpa is one of those communities defined as high risk, and there is a brief that is required by me. There are issues in respect of the financial situation, particularly the compliance components. We will, obviously, be looking at a more detailed compliance review. The other one is what we describe as divisional support or appropriate divisional type of support which involves developing a strategy, working more closely with the council itself, providing support to the CEO, assisting in having a look at service delivery in that community, and the issue of recruitment of staff. They are the two areas. So it is, yes.

Dr LIM: I just wonder whether you would consider bringing about, within the government's policy in funding the positions, that when you approve of recruits to be the CEO of each of the community government councils, you write within their duty statement that they should try to Aboriginalise every position in the council within a set period of time – say, in five years you have to have the PA's job Aboriginalised so that you drive the specific target for the CEO. That way, you will achieve a better outcome than saying: 'Here is your job, you do it the best way you can, and we hope you stay there for the next 10 years'. Forever those community government councils have been run by whitefella itinerants rather than locals who should be trying to do the job.

Mr McADAM: I do not disagree with you at all because it works two ways, quite apart from the CEO having the function or role of being able to work themselves out of a position or, indeed, develop a very good on-the-ground training scheme so people are brought up to those skill levels. That is one issue. I imagine that is something that would be taken into consideration during the interview process. Of course, the other one is that, quite apart from the CEO, it is incumbent upon the local councils themselves to ensure that those sorts of strategies or safeguards are in place, so that it is a two-pronged thing. I am not disagreeing with you, but I have heard the same yarn, the same story for the last 25-odd years, going back to the late 1970s, without telling how old I am. It is the same issue: your job is to train people and get out. It has been going on for 30-odd years, probably longer.

It remains a challenge and it comes back to what I said about how we start putting in place new arrangements for councils out bush. I am sure that if you were a CEO there, you would not like to deal with all the issues that I have just spoken about. It is up to us, the NT and Commonwealth governments, to ask how we can put in place something which is going to support them a bit more. That is what it comes down to. It is not a case of saying to people: 'Do this, do that'. That is fine, but the expectation is that is how it should be. Having said that, we have to be able to look at how we provide service provision, support, training and all that sort of stuff. I do not think it is coordinated as well as it could be. That is one area we will look at.

I want to add something here, which is probably relevant, but tell me if it is not. In talking about some of the issues out in the bush communities, and describing them as being dysfunctional or whatever - and some of them are, but there are others out there that, equally, are really going well. They are doing some good things. One of the things that this government would like to do, particularly in the next period - I

cannot give you a definite point in time just yet – is a review, local government reform, and how it is that we might be able to provide this extra support. That would also incorporate a review of the *Local Government Act* because one cannot do without the other. That is a joint exercise that will occur, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future. Essentially, it is an attempt to provide some certainty to the communities out there and to provide a framework.

In the past, I have mentioned since the demise of ATSI, and even when ATSI was there, quite apart from the communities being dysfunctional, we have been a bit dysfunctional - and I include the Commonwealth government there. We have to ask how can we do it, and that is a good opportunity because the view would be that there would be quite a lengthy process in talking to people there, indigenous and non-indigenous people, regarding how we put in place good governance arrangements through different models.

Dr LIM: Let me now come to Wadey, minister. Where was local government in the whole scheme of things?

Mr McADAM: I cannot give you all the precise details in respect of local government. On their actual roles, I might ask Nick to comment. However, I make the point that Wadey was a joint agreement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory government in the COAG Trial. I do not have the precise details, but I know that local government has had a role to play there. I have been there on two occasions and local government people were there when I was present. I ask Nick, if I may, to give you a more detailed response.

Mr SCARVELIS: I assume you are referring to the relationship with the COAG Trial and how the council interacted with that. It would be fair to say that the COAG Trial has been under review. I believe the most pertinent thing for this discussion to mention today would be that there has been an acknowledgement in that process, as the minister mentioned earlier, that perhaps all the stakeholders put too much pressure on Thamarrurr Council too fast through that COAG process. In fact, in our debriefings over the last couple of weeks with the council - and we have been working on it intensely - there has been an acknowledgement that if the council and its administration had focused more on the grassroots issues of good local government, perhaps they would not be quite as stressed as they are today.

As the minister mentioned earlier, it is about getting our timing right for advancing major government initiatives - that is, both the Territory and Australian governments - and we are clearly looking at the same issue at the moment regarding the roll-out of some of DEWRs initiatives. In communities like the Tiwi and Thamarrurr, there is an acceptance by the council that perhaps there is real merit in some of the objectives, but it is about the timing for change. The key issue there is to say that the Thamarrurr Council has been very involved. They have been very stressed by the social things that have happened but, clearly, the indigenous elder leaders have said to us that they are finding it more and more difficult to control the young ones. However, one of the ways through that now is to work with them on getting the day-to-day operations working well.

Mr McADAM: Member for Grotter, I forgot to mention this earlier, but you know how we talked about the idea is to try and coordinate services a bit more closely? We talked about 37 more functions on the Tiwis as opposed to Darwin City Council. When I was at Thamarrurr, they told that they were now dealing with 90 government funding agencies - 90 different service funding providers. So, something is not right. The COAG Trial is still under way, but you are going to find that they are going to say things such as the coordination side has just not worked.

Dr LIM: The Office of Local Government is not supporting them in coordinating all these funding streams and trying to pull the other agencies in together?

Mr McADAM: The point that I wish to make is that you would be aware that they have their own CEO. They have their assistant CEO. They have accountants and management support there. Quite properly, that is the role of those people on the ground of coordination. However, I daresay that both the Commonwealth and ourselves - and I am referring to Local Government - would be providing that sort of ongoing support to the respective managers.

Where a community is resourced appropriately - and the expectation is that those people pay big money to deliver those programs - as opposed to management on the ground, the fact is that over that period - and I do not know how many there were before, but if there are 90 there at the moment; and I doubt there would have been 90 before that - it has not worked. I cannot give you a breakdown of the grantee or the grantors.

I do not think there is any suggestion at all that Local Government officers have not been supportive of the people on the ground because I believe they have been.

I have some information, member for Grotorex. Apparently, there were only 53 prior to the COAG arrangements, and there are now 92, not 90. That gives you an indication.

Dr LIM: It is never easy to work with the Commonwealth government instrumentalities. That is one of the problems. Anyway, minister, is Wadeye the other dysfunctional community government council?

Mr SCARVELIS: It has been added to the list now.

Dr LIM: I just wondered whether you want to give me the list.

Mr McADAM: Well, if I can. My advice from Mr Scarvelis is that it was in the high risk category. I do not want to release information that might be premature in respect of any council. We have some concerns about some of the compliances. We are having discussions with the council via Mr David Cole, who is the coordinator. What I am saying is that we are aware of it and we are working with them.

Dr LIM: Have the councils that are currently classified high risk been advised that they are in that category and they need to work towards at least a moderate if not low risk?

Mr McADAM: As Mr Scarvelis advised, this is all part of the risk audit, the analysis. They take place in respect of the councils and the staff and they are advised of it. In respect of this other matter, I have written to them as well of late.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I am trying to lead up to is that your interview on the *Four Corners* program continues to rattle in my head. I recall you - and I watched you on a very big screen so you were larger than life - telling the reporter that you thought there were about 20 councils in the same parlous state as the Imanpa council. If that is the case, I am really concerned that we are going to be faced with a huge breakdown of community councils in the Northern Territory.

Mr McADAM: What are you saying?

Dr LIM: You said there are about 20 other councils like in Imanpa. We have 56 community government councils and you are talking about 20. That is something like one-third. That is what struck me, minister. I am asking: what processes do you have in place to prevent those other 20 from collapsing like Imanpa appears to be collapsing?

Mr McADAM: Mr Chairman, the percentage in respect of the high risk - and I am right, we are talking about 49% which is around about that figure. As I say, for those communities that are at risk, we do have this risk analysis occur under which they are picked up and we respond accordingly. The important point that I want to come back to is that we acknowledge that there are some communities out there that are struggling. It is not as if they have been struggling for the last five years; they have been struggling for a long time. That is the reason why we will not go down this reform process. As I said to you, the important thing is that our communities out there, at the very least, deserve certainty and a framework in which to operate. In the past, that has never been there from either the Commonwealth or the NT government. That is what I am saying.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Sorry, member for Grotorex. I have just been informed *Hansard* are having trouble picking up your voice, minister.

Mr McADAM: Are they? I will try to speak up.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I am trying to draw from you is what specific support and resources are you putting in to ...

[electronic alarm]

Dr LIM: I would have been yelled at, Mr Chairman, if I did that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: My apologies.

Dr LIM: Minister, I will put the question to you again: what I am trying to draw from you is a description of what support and resources you are going to put in place to ensure that the councils that are at risk of failing are adequately provided with capacity to function better?

Mr McADAM: As I said before, we do have this risk analysis process in place and, as communities are identified, we respond accordingly. I do not want to give you examples or be specific as to the name of a community, but there was one that came with what I would describe as some fairly severe difficulties. We appointed a person there to help them through the exercise which was, basically, to provide support to get them back on track of a number of issues. It was also being able to provide support for the recruitment process.

It really depends upon the community, but let me assure you that where communities are at high risk or in danger of folding, for want of a better word, we do provide support as required. Each community is different, but we do that.

Dr LIM: I think Ngukurr and Willowra were stripped of their authority. Have they been reinstated?

Mr McADAM: Willowra, at the moment, is operating under Yuendumu.

Dr LIM: Still, they have not been reinstated?

Mr McADAM: Well, the council still exists but, in effect, we have an administrator. Willowra still remains ...

Dr LIM: Under the Yuendumu government.

Mr McADAM: That is correct. My latest advice is that it will be around August that elections will be held which will, in effect, restore the council. In regard to Ngukurr, my advice is that there is a new person who has been there for about three months, and they are starting to get back on track. It is going to be a struggle for them but, at the same time, they are very committed to addressing the difficulties, and they are back on track.

Dr LIM: Minister, do you recall the telephone conversation you and I had about another community that was going to elect an interim council, which then had to demonstrate capacity before a fully-fledged council would be appointed? Can you elaborate on that any further; whether that has been successful?

Mr McADAM: I do recall the conversation. My understanding is that elections did occur, the day after we spoke, under the auspices of the Electoral Commission. As you say, it was an interim council. My understanding is that request was a result of advice from community meetings and that that interim council continues to operate. However, I ask Mr Scarvelis to give you a more up-to-date report.

Mr SCARVELIS: That council had a meeting earlier this week. Part of the agenda was to map out its future after reassessment of its financial position and programs and moving towards an election. We are very much on track for that to happen as previously reported.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Could I intervene in this interrogation? We are an Estimates Committee and we are supposed to be having an open and transparent cross – you are talking about a conversation you have had. I appreciate the confidentiality of conversations you may have had with the minister and, obviously, I will not explore those. However, I ask that in the interest of keeping these hearings as open as we possibly can, that ...

Dr LIM: Yes, all right.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If the matter is subject to confidentiality ...

Dr LIM: No, it is not. I refrained from mentioning the name of the council with due respect to the council, but the content of the conversation I had with the minister, I elaborated upon, asking about the interim council and the elections - which was the content of the conversation. I am not hiding anything apart from the name of the council.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That is right, but there are other members of the committee and this is a public record. However, to a person reading the transcript, we would appear not to be disclosing information. That is all I

am asking. I am not criticising you. I am saying that a stranger reading the transcript might wonder why we are talking in code.

Dr LIM: I do not think we are talking in code; we are just not mentioning the name of the community.

Mr CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you.

Dr LIM: Well, I will leave it at that. I know that the member for Braitling is champing at the bit and so is my colleague, the member for Katherine. So, thank you.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman and member for Greatorex. Minister, I will be happy with short answers, too, because I may be repeating a few of the questions that the member for Greatorex asked. It is good to know that we do have a couple of successful councils, but would you say that – I think you have already acknowledged - there are too many other functions that we are expecting these small community councils to take on? We talk about the banks and what have you. Is there any plan to have central regional bodies to take on those functions and take them off community councils? While they continue to get bogged down in all that, they cannot concentrate on their core responsibilities.

Mr McADAM: The best way that I could answer that is that I previously referred to what I call the Local Government Reform Commission. We are still in the details of working that out over the next few months, but that is precisely why we want to have a look at it.

In providing support, the other model that has been referred to in the past is the regional authority type. We are not discounting that at all. What I am saying is that we need to engage all the communities out bush – the lot, including the non-indigenous community - in what might be a good model for the future. That is where we are going.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you think that one of the problems is that the councils do not really distinguish between local government governance and traditional cultural governance? There seems to be a bit of a contradiction in the way they govern and, quite often, they base it on cultural concerns.

Mr McADAM: That might be a view out there but, in certain circumstances, there is provision to incorporate indigenous practice, culture or tradition into a model which is compliant of whitefella standards of management. It goes back to my other point: what other council of a similar nature would be required to do what indigenous councils do out bush? That is the first thing we have to do.

I know that there are other councils that have incorporated indigenous components in respect of local government council models, and that is something that can be looked at. However, the bottom line is that that does not, in any way and nor should it, take away from the issue of accountability or good management principles. That is where we are coming from, and that is not specific to indigenous communities. If you are from Africa or anywhere else, that is a basic principle of governance.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is it part of your negotiations with the Commonwealth government to say to them: 'Hey, these are your functions; you do them', rather than expecting community councils to do them?

Mr McADAM: This is part of the review I referred to. We will be looking to engage the Commonwealth government in this exercise because it comes back to the point that I made: what is the point of going down this path if you are going to increase from 53 cost centres to 92? That is part of it.

Mrs BRAHAM: Your regional development coordinators - is that what they are called?

Mr McADAM: Development Coordinators.

Mrs BRAHAM: You were going to have nine. You had five and you have increased it to nine, I think you have said. Are all those based in communities? It was my understanding that some of them were not.

Mr McADAM: I have some information here. I will ask Mr Scarvelis to pull me up if I am wrong. The positions will be placed at: the Tiwi Islands; Wadeye; southern Barkly at Alpurrurulam and the person has already moved there; East Arnhem is Nhulunbuy; the Gulf is Borroloola; Vic River, which will be at Daguragu; Groote will be at Alyangula; and Nyirranggulung is in Katherine. I refer to the other one as a management advisory position, which is supporting the community, based in Papunya itself. There is another one at Mutitjulu.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is the reason that some of them are not based in communities lack of housing? They do not have suitable accommodation?

Mr McADAM: There is no doubt about that. There are some real difficulties with housing and recruiting people into communities. It is a big factor.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, how many community councils have their own by-laws? I do not mean just litter and dogs. I saw an example in Western Australia where they had by-laws that they actually enforced, and they were more to do with behaviour and management than anything.

Mr McADAM: Mr Chairman and member for Braitling, I am not aware of any that have by-laws, I have been advised. However, if there are, we will try and find out for you. I am aware that there are not necessarily by-laws, but there are some community councils that make their own ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Their own rules.

Mr McADAM: Well, there are not laws, I suppose, but, effectively, they do try to put in place ...

Mrs BRAHAM: I just thought it might be something you could look at: community councils should understand the idea of by-laws and starting to have some.

Mr McADAM: Let me assure you, member for Braitling, this is part of the exercise in respect of the review, the local government reform. It can happen in two parts under the *Local Government Act* and/or the actual commission. There are two parts under the *Local Government Act* or, indeed, under any new arrangements in restructuring.

Mrs BRAHAM: How many staff do you have in the Local Government office?

Mr McADAM: Mr Chairman, I do not have an exact figure. We can get that information and get back to you. Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: Mrs Braham, we can get that information for you if you give us a few minutes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Do staff from your office travel to communities?

Mr McADAM: Yes, they do.

Mrs BRAHAM: I was thinking about Muddy Waters and the way he used to get around, that is all.

Mr McADAM: Yes, I am aware of that. Certainly, the community development officers do visit communities, the CDOs. I have been out there and seen them, so they do visit.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have enough staff to do that when you consider the extent of the community councils?

Mr McADAM: Member for Braitling, you can never have enough but, of course, you make do with what you have. I believe the challenge there comes back to the point I made to the member for Grotorex: how do you make sure that you are utilising the existing resource base, both in dollar and human resources? That is where we want to engage the Commonwealth a lot more.

Do you wish a response in respect to the number of staff? There are 56 in Local Government and Community Development, and 17 in Water Safety and Animal Welfare.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is it possible to have that tabled?

Mr McADAM: Yes, we are happy to table that, Mr Chairman.

Mrs BRAHAM: I think you said we had three functioning amalgamated councils. Was it three or four? I am thinking of the Tiwi Council.

Mr McADAM: Three.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you have a five-year plan to incorporate more amalgamations? Can you tell us which areas may next be targeted?

Mr McADAM: Member for Braitling, you will be aware that the *Stronger Regions, Stronger Futures* document has released. It talked about the development or formation of new regional authorities. Some of that work is continuing in some areas as I speak. I will ask Mr Scarvelis to give you more detail. However, I come back to the original point I made: this will be the major task of this local government reform because the bottom line is that we have to provide certainty for the framework, and in respect of anything we do into the future. That is the reason why the local government reform process will be put into place. I ask Mr Scarvelis to give a breakdown on some of the others.

Mr SCARVELIS: There are a number of other communities of interest, as we refer to them, which are negotiating various forms of cooperation. I do not think you would go as far to say that, in all cases, they were at a point of considering forming a new local government body but, certainly, they are looking at resource sharing and a range of other ways of cooperating. They are, essentially, across the Territory. There are a couple in Katherine, there are a number of groupings in the Top End, and there is less direct activity at the moment in the south.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, I went to the IAD graduation the other day. There are no Local Government courses at IAD. You talked about training and the member for Greatorex says we do it. The focus has gone off, hasn't it? I do not know whether Batchelor is still doing it. There were courses that were of benefit and people were getting their certificates and what have you. Can you tell me where we are with that?

Mr McADAM: I cannot give all the details, but I concur that there seems to be a drop-off in community development-type management – yet, it is the area in most need; there is no doubt about that. I encourage the IADs and the Batchelor Colleges of this world. I think Batchelor College does some management components, but I do not know to what extent.

I urge training providers out there - the Bachelors, the IADs of this world - to start rethinking how they are going about it because it is sorely needed. I am aware that some people have gone to Western Australia, Curtin University, for this sort of study, but not as many as there should be. I ask Mr Scarvelis, if he can, to give you an update of some of the governance training that we have in mind or that we are presently doing.

Mr SCARVELIS: There is a plethora of courses that are currently available through various universities and higher education institutions. However, our observation is that there is very little targeted at local government in a context that we know it, not only in the Territory, but also in parts of Western Australia and Queensland. For that reason, we have teamed up with Reconciliation Australia and we are currently writing what I might term a 'tool set'. Rather than people entering into courses, what we want to be able to do is have the tools for our CDOs and other people who can be involved in an intervention in the community to identify the problem that a community might have and work through it in a project-managed context. It is on-the-ground learning rather than school-based learning that we are targeting.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, it would be great if that happens because that is what is needed when we talk about training people to take over these tasks. The Kurduju Committee, I believe, comes under your portfolio now?

Mr McADAM: No, it does not. It is under the Department of Justice.

Mrs BRAHAM: I thought the minister for Justice passed it on to you. It does not, okay.

Is this the place to ask about the Town Camp Task Force report? Okay. I believe it is completed and that is to go to Cabinet and, as yet, there have not been identified monies in the budget because you are not quite sure where you are going with it. Could you give us a bit of feedback on what has happened?

Mr McADAM: Yes, the report is with us at the moment and we are going through a process. Let me put it this way, if I may: you have probably heard that there already has been an allocation of \$20m on the part of the Commonwealth. Essentially, that was in two parts: one was to do with what I would describe as an infrastructure upgrade such as power, water, sewage and roads on the community. That is part of ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Lighting, yes.

Mr McADAM: Yes, that was a \$10m allocation. There was a further \$10m commitment on the part of the Commonwealth. I am not absolutely certain of what that commitment is. I do not have all the details, but there was a commitment made by minister Brough in Alice. What the Territory government has said is that we will provide \$10m as well over a two-year period. I do not think you can achieve it all within a two-year period; it all depends. The point is that we have committed \$10m and that is for supported accommodation options, basically designed to alleviate overcrowding in the town camps.

We are talking about, as I say, supported managed accommodation whereby we are going to seek expressions of interests in Alice Springs to have a look at how we can put those into place. I wish to emphasise that they will be managed. We are saying they are going to be properly managed on a daily basis, the same as with Stuart Lodge. The other component of that \$10m was for upgrades of some of the existing houses in suburbs in Alice Springs.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, that is right. The Back to Country program comes under you also?

Mr McADAM: My advice is that program falls under Health and Community Services.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, yes, it probably is.

Mr McADAM: We are happy to discuss that under Community Harmony if you wish.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. There are two camps, Namatjira and Light Gate, which do not have special purpose leases. Is it your intent that they no longer exist, or will you encourage them to apply for a special purpose lease?

Mr McADAM: I am not too sure what the task force says about that, so I do not have intent at all to either incorporate them as town camps in their own right or to wind them back. It is a very serious issue and we need to have a look at how we can improve the quality of life for people residing in those places but, at this time, it would be premature to give a definitive response.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, Mr Chairman, that is all for now.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, one of the communities that is in my electorate has struggled financially and, as you are well aware, has had some assistance from local government. They are presently talking with Katherine Town Council to have their services provided by the council, which is a good option for them. It gives them the opportunity to be able to concentrate on their own community government responsibilities, as you say, because they have too many to get their heads around. Are there any other communities throughout the Northern Territory that have had that same opportunity to be taken under the auspices of a local government authority that are working successfully and have those services provided?

Mr McADAM: Member for Katherine, in a way, that is what the Town Camps Task Force stuff addresses because we are talking about under the municipal council, which is not dissimilar to the community near Katherine. The other one that springs to mind is Elliott, which I do not think is in its final form, where you had a joining between the Gurungu Council and the Elliott District Council. That is one place where it has occurred; I do not think it absolutely final yet. There is one in Alice Springs, as you know. They are the two that spring to mind other than the one that you referred to. Mr Scarvelis or Mr Dillon might wish to add to that.

Mr DILLON: I do not think we can add much more than the minister has said except that Gurungu was not a local government council; it was just an association. The one thing I could add is that I understand some of the municipals are being very proactive in offering their services to assist community government councils: Darwin City Council in providing assistance to Tiwi; and Palmerston made the offer to be of assistance. It is a matter that will be looked at in this reform process, so the seed of the idea that we are pursuing in Katherine is likely to grow into a larger shrub.

Mrs MILLER: It would appear that the one in Katherine will be a good example if more community councils could be taken under the auspices of municipal councils, which already has all the equipment and facilities in place to be able to take over those programs.

On the subject of training, and the member for Brainting touched on this. Many moons ago when I was elected as an alderman of the Katherine Town Council, rather than the aldermen from community government councils and town or municipal councils having the expense of going interstate to courses which were extremely expensive and out of the reach of not only the aldermen personally but, of course, the

councils as well, the Local Government Association ran some courses on administrative procedures in Darwin at a reduced rate over a two-day period, which was extremely helpful. Would it be a good suggestion that leadership in local government would have that training for two days followed by on-the-ground training in their communities? Would that be a good option?

Mr McADAM: Member for Katherine, any initiative to provide proper training to people out in the bush or on communities, particularly the area of management in local government, is something we would all welcome. That is why I cannot understand why we do not have the same focus in some of the larger training institutions going back out bush or having a combination. We used to do it quite a bit in the past. The suggestion is a good one and it is something the department might want to take up with IAD, in the case of Alice Springs to the south, and maybe Batchelor College. We will take it on board because it is something that we need to do as part of local government reform. I agree with you both. Mr Scarvelis would like to add something.

Mr SCARVELIS: We have programs in part of the training I mentioned earlier. It would be sensible that some of our indigenous leaders, and particularly our younger leaders, have an opportunity, for instance, to visit the Mayor of Katherine on the Mayor's territory and see how those councils operate. That is certainly part of the training that we are now thinking about.

Mrs MILLER: It would be very important because all of us know that you cannot possibly be expected to take on these responsibilities without having some training to run complex organisations effectively. It would be imperative to have that.

The only other question I have, and the member for Braitling asked about it, was about the regional coordinators and regional groups. How are you going to get these communities in the dysfunctional high risk area into regional partnerships or regional councils before they get into the topple over stage? Do they have to topple over first before you are able to take them into a regional partnership, or are you able to do that now?

Mr McADAM: The important thing is to continue to support those communities that are at risk in every possible way that we can to try to work towards making them sustainable. The important thing here is that whatever new model that we come up with, particularly under this local government reform that we are talking about, is that there has to be proper consultation. The most important thing is people have to understand and be aware of what it is. I do not wish to be critical, no matter whether you are indigenous or not, but the best option is to operate within a framework that provides certainty. I do not think that has happened in the past in the Northern Territory in respect of local government or community councils in the bush. So, the answer your question is: no, we are not going to force those communities to amalgamate as an interim measure. We will continue to provide them with the support that we think is appropriate to help them. We will continue to talk to them and other communities about how we best go forward within a framework of certainty. Does that answer your question?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, it does.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in relation to Output 1.1? That being the case, that concludes consideration Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 - Water Safety and Animal Welfare

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions in Output 1.2, Water Safety and Animal Welfare. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes. Minister, last year, we had a long discussion about swimming pool fencing and the catch-up that had to occur that cost something like \$25m. This year, I note it is \$2.5m that is going to be required for Water Safety and Animal Welfare. Can you assure me that all the swimming pool fencing issues have been caught up, and now we are into routine inspections of newly-constructed pool fencing?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorox, no, I cannot assure you of that. However, what I might do is get you some details from Mr Dillon who will be able to give you a status report of where we are on the swimming pools and, if necessary, water safety.

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. There has been significant progress ...

Dr LIM: There is no or there is significant?

Mr DILLON: There has been significant progress over the past three years. There have been over 10 264 applications received since 1 January 2003. Of those applications, there have been 10 045 properties inspected. There is an outstanding number of 219 properties to be inspected. There have been over 7000 compliance certificates issued since that time, and a smaller number of just under 400 provisional compliance certificates issued.

Regarding the value of grants, there has been almost \$6m of grants processed since that time. It is fair to say that we are over the hump in putting in place the new legislative framework. We are now on the downward slope. Obviously, there is a housing boom in the Territory. Along with that housing boom, which has terrific advantages, for us, it also has the downside of an ongoing workload with new pools going in alongside the new houses so there will be a significant workload for us into the future.

Dr LIM: You are keeping pace with it? There is no catch-up required now, or is there still the catch-up?

Mr DILLON: The data I have just given you indicates there is certainly not a backlog. The challenge for us is to keep up with the housing boom.

Dr LIM: Have the staffing numbers been decreased in that unit or have they remained the same?

Mr McADAM: Mr Dillon, do you wish to respond to that?

Mr DILLON: Yes, I can. When we put the new legislative framework in place, we made provision for the hump that we had to get over. Yes, there were considerable resources allocated by the government with a specific time frame, and that included staff. Yes, there has been a reduction in staff from when we first put the legislative framework in place. That was always planned; it has not been a matter of subsequent decisions. There has been some reduction in the past year.

Dr LIM: I note from Budget Paper No 3, page 256, that you anticipate that the waiting period will be longer because your percentage has gone down from 80% to 70%. Will that delay development or sales of property, could this decrease in staff numbers give rise to delay in inspection and issue of certificates?

Mr McADAM: I refer that to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: There are two points to make about that, Dr Lim. One is that when people are putting new houses in place and building new pools, if they get on and go through the process straight away, there should not be delays down the track when they come to sell their unit or their house. It is fair to say, though, that we have had, to coin a phrase, a number of recalcitrants who never took the process seriously. At times, we have situations where people suddenly realise that they are about to sell their unit or their house and that they need the requisite compliance certificate because the buyers are not interested in buying without a compliant pool. In those situations, yes, there can be a delay because you suddenly go to the end of the waiting list and it will take you a couple of months to have your pool ruled compliant.

We have made extraordinary efforts in a number of cases to fix that. There is an alternative route available to people, and that is the Community Safety Standard under the legislation, which allows people to self-certify and, so, in a sense, that is an alternative route that means you do not have to go through the waiting list. The legislation is actually very flexible and it has proven, I believe, to have worked remarkably well.

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister. In regards to animal welfare, I assume that there are no more law suits against very rich business entrepreneurs?

Mr McADAM: I do not think I will comment there.

Dr LIM: I am just making sure that there are no other lawsuits in the offing.

Mr McADAM: I will not comment on that.

Dr LIM: I will try to make it a bit easier. We have been here a long time. Well, I have been here a long time.

Mr McADAM: No, there are not.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, for the sake of accuracy, I make the point that we do manage the animal welfare legislation and there may be a number of investigations in place that will lead to legal action, but they are purely routine.

Dr LIM: Good to hear.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, the Alice Springs Town Council has a program whereby a vet would go into town camps and either put down, immunise or treat dogs. Does the Territory government fund a program such as the Healthy Dogs program on communities?

Mr McADAM: I am not too certain of that. It is a Commonwealth-funded program, to the best of my knowledge.

Mrs BRAHAM: Commonwealth?

Mr McADAM: To the best of my knowledge. I know that at Borroloola, they were working with the community in respect of a dog vaccination program.

Mrs BRAHAM: We do not see the number of dogs in Darwin we see in the southern part of the Territory.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Member for Braitling, would you allow the minister to finish?

Mrs BRAHAM: I am sorry, minister.

Mr McADAM: As I just said to you, I am aware that there is a Commonwealth-funded program. I am aware that there is some money allocated from Health and Community Services to Tangentyere in respect of an environmental-type program, which incorporates a dog program. They are the only ones I am aware of other than what the Department of Local Government funds through the municipals.

Mrs BRAHAM: Are they monitored by Local Government?

Mr McADAM: My understanding is that the local government councils have no responsibility for registration of dogs. In monitoring or policing dogs, I know they do in Tennant Creek, and I am certain that they do it in Alice Springs. So, yes, Local Government does have a role through municipal councils.

Mrs BRAHAM: It probably is something important because we are talking about healthy lifestyles. I have forgotten what my other question was, so I have no more questions, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Lucky for some, minister. Member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Mine was along similar lines to the member for Braitling, but I wanted to know does the *Animal Welfare Act* apply to community government councils as well?

Mr McADAM: My advice, member for Katherine, is that it applies to all citizens of the Northern Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Right. Apart from the programs that we have just heard about, like the Healthy Dogs program and, for instance, Alice Springs Town Council going in and cleaning up dogs, what happens to all these mangy dogs, dogs that are covered with ticks, and malnourished dogs? How do we control those in community government-run council areas? They are a health risk.

Mr McADAM: In certain circumstances, it comes back to this point: it is the poor community government council that has to deal with this sort of thing. It is thrown back on them again. It is one of the areas where it is left to those people to deal with. I am aware that people have visited some communities to try to assist them in dog control, for the want of a better word. I cannot answer the question of what do you do with them; I just cannot answer that or how you get rid of them. I believe it is through a combination of education and of service providers being out there - environmental health people from other agencies. In some cases, it could well be that the community may wish to reach a deal with the municipal council that has the resources. I know that is what has happened in Borroloola as well, quite apart from the Commonwealth one. The Tennant Creek Town Council sent up their people to Borroloola. There is a bit of scope there to deal with it.

Mrs MILLER: I have to say I like the idea of the education bit. Everybody loves their dog but a lot of people do not know how to look after their dog properly. I believe education is a good way to go.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any further questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Mr Chairman, I thought of it! Does the RSPCA in Alice Springs receive its funding direct from government, or does it receive its funding through the NT Association?

Mr McADAM: My advice, member for Braitling, is that they receive it via Darwin through the RSPCA. I actually met with them the other day and, yes, the funding is through Darwin. They are going to have a yarn to see how they can work together.

Dr Lim: Good luck! We have been trying for five or six years now.

Mrs MILLER: Is it Commonwealth funding, minister?

Mr McADAM: No, that is NT government funding.

Mrs MILLER: NT government funding for RSPCA?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: No.

Mr CHAIRMAN: That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – LIBRARY AND INDIGENOUS SERVICES **Output 2.1 – Libraries**

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 2.0, Library and Indigenous Services, Output 2.1, Libraries.

Dr LIM: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: If you could just hang on, shadow minister, for the advisors?

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Just one quick question, minister, if I may. You have oversight of the library downstairs in Parliament House, the NT Library?

Mr McADAM: Sorry?

Dr LIM: I am asking do you have oversight over the library in Parliament House also?

Mr McADAM: Yes.

Dr LIM: Minister, you may be interested to know that I have received several complaints from local Darwinians that tourists are allowed to use Internet access through the Parliament House library. Sorry, I did not realise you had ...

Mrs ANGUS: Yes.

Dr LIM: Are you all right?

Mrs ANGUS: Yes, it is in plaster.

Dr LIM: Oh, gee.

A member: She is waving to you.

Dr LIM: Oh, sorry.

Mrs Braham: We need a doctor.

Dr LIM: Well, as a doctor, I notice these things. Minister, I have had several complaints from people in Darwin that tourists have free access to the use of computers and the Internet service in the Parliament House library. There is no charge imposed on tourists, whereas there are Internet cafes in town that provide the very same service. The question is: should there be some distinction made between local users and tourists who try to access free Internet services in our library when (1) it takes away the trade from private operators of Internet cafes; and (2), it deprives Territorians of the use of Internet access in our library for which they have paid through their taxes, etcetera?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, all I can say to you is that I certainly have not received any complaints in that regard. I do not know whether officers of the department have received any. I beg your pardon. My advice is that they have received one complaint and, obviously, we will respond to that. If I leave it at that and give an assurance that we will ...

Dr LIM: Thank you, minister, for making the commitment. My point is that there are private enterprise operators in town that provide the same service to make a living, and we provide free Internet service to people who are, in fact, exploiting our system. It is really a little unfair. That is all I have for libraries.

Mrs BRAHAM: No questions.

Mrs MILLER: The only one I wanted to ask, minister, was: how many libraries do we have in remote communities?

Mr McADAM: I will get the department to respond, but I think there are libraries in respect of municipal government arrangements, and there are 22 in the remote regions. Of course, we have others in our other municipal councils and Taminmin.

Mrs MILLER: Do those in the remote communities receive some grant funding annually to be able to upgrade their library supplies?

Mr McADAM: Yes, they do. All community libraries receive funding in their operational grants. I will ask the department to speak to you a bit more about this because it is based on a formula and it does not spring to mind. Trish Angus.

Ms ANGUS: Yes, community libraries receive funding based on population, and it is correct that there are 22.

Mrs MILLER: Is that for replacement of stock, or for wages for administration to run the library?

Ms ANGUS: It is for operational grants and it is for providing community library services and the knowledge centre services.

Mrs MILLER: So it is not actually to add to their stock of library resources?

Ms ANGUS: No, stock supplies are separate.

Mr McADAM: Member for Katherine, I am happy to table the dollars in respect of communities. Ms Angus can clarify the formula.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Ms ANGUS: To be specific how the population formula is applied, there are \$30 000 for populations under 1000; \$40 000 for populations between 1000 and 2500; and \$60 000 for populations over 2500.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 2:1.

Output 2.2 - Community Harmony

Mr CHAIRMAN: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Community Harmony. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, I put this question to you in my response to the Appropriation Bill and I repeat it here: are you that satisfied with the level of community harmony that you are able to allow one program to be dropped off?

Mr McADAM: Member for Grotorex, I do remember the response. The situation has not changed in terms of my response. As you know, there was a refocusing or a rearrangement in the provision of the Night Patrol program in Darwin. You would be aware that Mission Australia carried out the Night Patrol component of that and, of course, the Larrakia Nation also carried out some functions in respect of the Community Harmony program. What occurred was a result of the ACPO model, which came under the direct control of the police, as opposed to the Night Patrol program. So, what you had was a transfer of the existing dollars - I cannot remember precisely what they were - across to the police, and there was a further input of \$600 000 of new money to the new model, which was the ACPO model under the police.

I disagree with you. I do not believe that has been any decrease in dollars at all. What you now have in place is a far more effective model. It is enhanced by the fact that the Larrakia Nation carries out the intervention and transport service and the police, under the ACPO model, provide what was previously carried out by Mission Australia. So, I do not accept that there has been a decrease in the level of service. I think it has been enhanced through this model. The other point is that has been no decrease at all in dollars.

Dr LIM: Minister, thank you for your response. I was not concerned about whether there was a decrease in dollars to the program. My question specifically was: are you so happy with the Community Harmony and antisocial behaviour issues in the Northern Territory that you are prepared to allow one of the Community Harmony programs to drop off? You could have your ACPO program as well as your Larrakia intervention programs, and you would enhance community harmony more than just letting one drop and passing the money across to the other. That is not what I am talking about. I am saying have the ACPO by all means, but keep the Larrakia intervention program going as well.

Mr McADAM: I thought I explained that the Larrakia program actually continued. As I said, there was a refocusing, but there was a continuation of the Larrakia program. It might be useful to ask Trish Angus to enunciate precisely what it is that each program does and that might explain it a little better.

Dr LIM: No, I will accept that. I put this question to you: which will combine the whole lot together? If you look at page 257 of Budget Paper No 3 under Community Harmony in Performance Measures. Community Harmony Services delivered – and then you have two superscripts, 1 and 2. In 2, the number reduces to seven as the Larrakia Host program is ceasing in 2006-07. What I am saying is that program is going to disappear. Why?

Mr McADAM: I will ask Trish to answer that.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, the Larrakia Host program disappeared inasmuch as it became absorbed. Part of the function became absorbed within the ACPO program. The remainder of it, and the full funding that went to Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, remained intact. The program became what is known as the Larrakia Intervention Services. Whilst it appears that one program has dropped, in actuality, it has not. The LIS program replaced what the Host did, but it does it in a more refocused and more targeted way, with less focus on patrols but rather more on an intervention, transport and mobile information service to community members.

Dr LIM: That is good, thank you. I appreciate that response. Minister, we have been talking very cordially so far, and this is going to be something that might upset you. Do not take it in any other way than an attempt to try to get information. You say that public satisfaction with the reduction of antisocial behaviour remains at about 50%. I put to you that in Alice Springs it is not 50%; it is less. In Tennant Creek, it is definitely not 50%; it is less. In Katherine it is not 50%; it is less. To average it out across the Territory, if I do not include Nhulunbuy and use Darwin alone, Darwin must be well above 50% to bring it in an average of 50% satisfaction. Do you believe that the figures are acceptable? I find these figures not believable.

Mr McADAM: Thank you, member for Grotorex. I agree with you. I do not think 50% over a two-year period would be acceptable. I acknowledge that what occurs out there is of concern to everyone, both indigenous and non-indigenous. I would like to see the satisfaction level, in terms reduction, increase. Clearly, that would be the case and anyone would want to go down that path. I suppose what I am saying is that it remains one of the big issues for us in the Territory.

Dr LIM: Minister, I welcome that comment from you, that you agree with me that there is no public satisfaction in terms of antisocial behaviour in the Northern Territory. I look forward to the department responding to the comment you just made and endeavour in any way they can to decrease the level of antisocial behaviour there is in the Territory.

Mr McADAM: If I can comment, it is important to understand that, effectively, my department purely has a coordination-type role and a funding role, of course. As you would be aware, the issue you refer to is also within the auspices or responsibilities of other government agencies. You will acknowledge that this government has worked strenuously in trying to develop regional-type strategies. BRSCC in Tennant Creek is an example. I went to the Katherine Community Harmony program, and I know that despite the challenges, they are working extremely hard. This is a whole-of-government approach. The Katherine Town Council has a person there who is, essentially, a liaison person who talks to people in regards to some of the issues that we referred to. I am also aware that there are other initiatives. I refer to Katherine in particular, where the police are having a look at different options and models in conjunction with the community under the auspices of the Community Harmony project. Of course, you would also be aware that in Alice Springs, Lhere Artepe has been working in respect of the protocols. It is a small part, but the point I wish to make is that there is a very committed effort on the part of this government to work across agencies, particularly in respect of communities. That is where it starts from; to engage them in strategies which, hopefully, reduces the behaviour that we find unacceptable.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I am saying is that I see the Northern Territory government working fairly actively in Darwin, particularly with the Larrakia people, to try and enhance this. There is not the same visibility of the Northern Territory government in the rest of the Territory in the same context as the Larrakia people. You mentioned the Lhere Artepe and their program, the TV advertising, the Harmony Day that we held at the Senior Citizens' grounds. That was a fantastic day, and the TV advertising that they have done now is a positive step.

I would have thought on a day like that, that you, as the minister, or the Chief Minister, should have been there to give that program the imprimatur and the status that it deserves. However, you did not, and that is a pity. It was a judgment call, and I believe it was a missed opportunity. There needs to be more government support in terms of presence, of being visible and openly supporting these programs. Otherwise, it will not work.

The question is: will you give the commitment that you need to be more visible, visibly supporting indigenous groups out there which are trying to promote Community Harmony? After all, there is a lot of goodwill in the community across the Territory for Community Harmony and, if the government is visible, I think it will work better.

Mr McADAM: What event were you referring to?

Dr LIM: Harmony Day. It is a Multicultural Affair event, within the context of harmony.

Mr McADAM: In Alice Springs?

Dr LIM: Yes.

Mr McADAM: I cannot tell you why I was not there; nonetheless, Alison Anderson represented me on that occasion.

Dr LIM: She represented the Chief Minister.

Mrs Braham: She was there.

Dr LIM: I know she was there. I was there.

Mr McADAM: I wish to correct you, member for Greatorex. It was my office which arranged for Alison Anderson to be present on the day in question. That clarifies that. The important point to understand here is that we did have government representation there and your blanket statement, in effect, as to why I or the Chief Minister were not present does not hold water because, clearly, we have other obligations and other commitments. I want to say to you that other than Alice Springs, I have been to the Larrakia twice. I have attended something like three meetings in regards to coordination groups that we have here in Darwin and we continue to work with them. The other point that I wish to make is that Katherine, at least two occasions, and, of course, BRSCC in Tennant Creek, I have actually ...

Dr LIM: You live there.

Mr McADAM: Of course, and I am proud to live there. I attended at least two of their meetings. It is also important to understand that discussions have occurred with the Chief Minister. As a result of that, we went off to Cairns to have a look at their program. For you to suggest that there is not a focus, or there appears to be lack of commitment on the part of the Northern Territory government, is absolutely wrong. It is one area where there have been some real inroads, particularly in respect of break and enters and that sort of stuff. There is a greater focus on domestic violence, whether you like it or not. There is a greater focus in relation to this government. All I can say to you is that I refute your suggestion that there has been a lesser focus because the evidence is there for all to see.

Dr LIM: Minister, sorry to disagree with you here but, in fact, I know that the member for Macdonnell represented a minister at the function in Alice Springs. It was announced over the PA that she was representing the Chief Minister, not yourself. That is by the by. Minister, I put to you ...

Mr McADAM: I just want to comment if I can. The thing that you refer to was the launch of the protocols.

Dr LIM: Yes, that is right.

Mr McADAM: I can assure you that Alison Anderson was requested to attend on my behalf.

Dr LIM: I accept that. I accept that. What they announced on the PA is not necessarily accurate.

Mrs Braham: Let us get on with it.

Dr LIM: Yes, let us get on with it.

Mr McADAM: Who cares? There was government representation.

Dr LIM: I beg your pardon.

Mr McADAM: The point I am trying to make to you is that there was government representation.

Dr LIM: Yes, there was. The point I was trying to make, minister - and I ask whether you agree with it - is that the government does not appear to be as visible standing side by side with Aboriginal people. Here in Darwin, it is quite visible, but not so much in the other centres. Let me refer to the letter that has since been withdrawn by a member of this parliament - it has to be the case. I am asking that you add your presence in the other centres as well.

Mr McADAM: So what is your question?

Dr LIM: The question I am asking is whether you do that.

Mr McADAM: Do what?

Dr LIM: Increase the presence in the other centres.

Mr McADAM: So, you are telling me what to do now. How do I respond to that?

Dr LIM: I am not telling you what to do. I am asking you whether you will. Yes or no? It is easy to say. If you do not want to, you do not have to. It is your choice.

Mr McADAM: All I can say to you is that we will continue to do what we do and act in the best interests of all Territorians, including indigenous people.

Dr LIM: No more questions, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Any more questions?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, Mr Chairman. Minister, does your department fund Lhere Artepe Association and, if they do, how much?

Mr McADAM: I will seek some advice on that. My understanding is that there have been two grants. I might be wrong. Certainly, there was one for \$5000. The other one was a sum of \$12 000, giving a total of \$17 000.

Mrs BRAHAM: Will that be an annual grant or was it on application or submission?

Mr McADAM: It was on application. If you are talking about Community Harmony expenditure, that is what it was.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me how much the consultancy for the Town Camp Task Force cost?

Mr McADAM: We can give you a rough estimate, member for Braitling. My understanding is that – and these are still to be confirmed – there is a total cost that I am aware of at this point of around about \$13 500. We are still awaiting some other information about travel arrangements, so there could be some other things that I am not aware of. I will ask the department in a minute, but we are talking, potentially, of \$18 000 to \$20 000 all up.

Mrs BRAHAM: Could you tell me how much funding the Alice Springs Aboriginal Housing Association has received this year for next financial year?

Mr McADAM: Yes, I can tell you. We can do it under a different output if you wish.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay. Do you want me to come back to it?

Mr McADAM: It is a different output, but I think it is about \$276 000.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We should keep it to that output, minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Okay, I will keep it for that output. We talked about Return to Country earlier. Did you say you could give me some information about the Return to Country program?

Ms ANGUS: Mrs Braham, the Return to Country program at Tangentyere has previously been funded by the Department of Health and Community Services as indicated by minister McAdam earlier, but ongoing funding is not secure. More recently - and this is over the last couple of months - we have entered into discussions with the Indigenous Coordination Centre, the ICC, and the Tangentyere council in respect of striking a shared responsibility agreement in order to look at funding such a program in this coming financial year. That has not been finalised yet with the Commonwealth. Our intention, though, is that it would not be run under the old auspice and program management that it was run under but, rather, under the program direction that we would be wanting, which is a much stricter accountability and cost recovery.

Mrs BRAHAM: Not Tangentyere?

Ms ANGUS: It would go out to tender.

Mrs BRAHAM: It would go to tender?

Ms ANGUS: Yes, therefore, I cannot guarantee that Tangentyere might not win that tender.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, but it is by tender. Does the Living Schools Program come under Community Harmony?

Mr McADAM: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you want me to leave it until later?

Mr McADAM: Yes.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do the Acceptable Behaviour Agreements come under this, or are they under another output?

Mr McADAM: They are under a different output, Housing Services.

Mrs BRAHAM: You have a general drift of where I am going.

Mr McADAM: Thanks for the advance notice.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I do not think you will get there until later.

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, we hope we will get there tonight.

Mrs MILLER: Minister, the Community Harmony programs - where are they operating in the Territory, apart from Katherine?

Mr McADAM: We I will ask Ms Angus to answer that question because, obviously, I do not know every one.

Ms ANGUS: Mrs Miller, the Community Harmony strategy is not confined only to this portfolio. As you may be aware, it is a strategy that sits across a whole-of-government approach. Therefore, there are some output areas and operational details that belong to Health and Community Services in their alcohol area, and with police now with the patrols. However, in respect of the Community Harmony strategy programs that are funded through this agency, it operates in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin and Nhulunbuy.

Mrs MILLER: The main centres only?

Ms ANGUS: Yes, that was the focus, the main centres but, quite clearly, the client group are often predominantly from remote areas, hence the importance of working with the elders from those remote communities.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions in regard to this output?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, just one. Minister, in a response to the member for Greatorex, you talked about looking at a program in Cairns. What program did you look at?

Mr McADAM: It was around about six weeks ago that I was accompanied to Cairns by Ms Tammy White who is the Executive Officer of the Community Harmony Program, and Mr James O'Brien, who is the Superintendent of Police in Katherine. The Homelands Partnership is what it is called in Cairns and it is very similar to what occurs here in the Northern Territory, with the LIS-type program in returning people back to country. We also had the opportunity to participate in a workshop where we learnt about what their program was, and Ms White did a presentation. The idea was to get some fresh ideas and an understanding of how we might do it better.

It is fair to say that our program is very similar in nature, but the exception is that we are dealing with - I cannot remember the figure in the Return to Country here - but 1651 was our returns and in Cairns it was less than 150, if I remember correctly. As you can see, there is quite a difference, but the thing we liked about the Cairns model was that there were high levels of coordination across agencies. It was coordinated by the police and involved their equivalent Health and Correctional Services, which played an important role. They were on the committee as well. There was also a Commonwealth input in regard to Centrelink, which played a key role, as it does here in the Northern Territory in assisting deductions. However, they seem to play a bit more of an expanded role in Cairns.

The idea was to compare the existing programs and learn from them, and we did. They have a really enhanced coordination mechanism in place which we would like to duplicate here in the Territory.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions under this output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 - Indigenous Housing

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 2.3, Indigenous Housing. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, I could not reconcile the amount of money that has been put towards indigenous housing versus the number of new dwellings and upgrades completed. Could you or your officers elaborate

on that? You are spending something in the order of \$60m. I see from the estimate you have some 77 new dwellings and 15 upgrades completed. That appears to be a very expensive exercise.

Mr McADAM: Mike Dillon will answer that.

Mr DILLON: The construction program for 2006-07 under the Indigenous Housing Program will total around \$40m. Of the \$60m, \$20m will be on repairs and maintenance. The quantity of new construction of dwellings of 84 will be funded from that \$600 000.

Dr LIM: Sorry, that does not work out. I thought the 2005-06 estimate was around \$60m, which translates to \$40m for 77 new dwellings and \$20 million for 15 upgrades completed. That is how I read it. Then you had \$64m for 2006-07, which you anticipate will provide you with 84 new dwellings and 20 upgrades, am I right?

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, where are you quoting from?

Dr LIM: Page 257 and 255. On page 255 under Indigenous Housing you have the 2005-06 estimate of \$60 244 000m.

Mr DILLON: That is right.

Dr LIM: Then for 2006-07 budget, you have \$64.433m.

Mr DILLON: That is right.

Dr LIM: Then you go page 257, you have the 2005-06 estimate of 77 new dwellings constructed and 15 upgrades completed. Divide that \$40m for 77 new dwellings and \$20m for 15 upgrades, it appears very expensive. Obviously, for \$64m you anticipate building 84 new dwellings and have 20 upgrades.

Mr DILLON: Dr Lim, the problem you have is that the \$64m is included in each of those four lines on page 257, so it includes new dwellings, upgrades, management grants distributed, and maintenance grants. On top of that, it includes a range of operational services such as employment and training, housing advisory services, life skills, some research and development, and land servicing as well as a management fee. It is not as simple as just dividing 84 houses into \$60m. That will give you a misleading result.

Dr LIM: That is the figure I am coming up with at the moment. Minister, are you able to provide me with a breakdown of how the \$60.244m was expended in the year 2005-06?

Mr McADAM: Do you wish me to table this document, or do you ...

Dr LIM: I do not know what the content of the document is, but if it makes it easier for me to understand, yes.

Mr McADAM: What I am prepared to do, if you wish, is to read out the expenditure ...

Dr LIM: Do not do that because I cannot absorb figures verbally.

Mr McADAM: That is what I am saying. Do you want to ask some other questions. I am happy to ...

Dr LIM: If you table the document, that is great.

Mr McADAM: We are prepared to table for you a document in respect of expenditure that applies to 2005-06.

Dr LIM: That is fine. That will give me a better understanding of how the \$64m will be divided up for 2006-07.

Minister, I understand from another minister yesterday that Indigenous Housing Services are now being picked up by that Indigenous Housing Services will now coordinate the construction of homes and other construction activities in the bush. Will you confirm that is correct?

Mr McADAM: Mr Chairman, that is correct.

Dr LIM: That being correct, how do you then retain control of the \$64m that you have put aside for new dwellings, upgrades, management grants and maintenance grants?

Mr McADAM: I might ask members of my staff to answer that question as well, to fill in any gaps that I cannot address. Clearly, for expenditure in respect of new dwellings, there is a transfer of that money across to DPI. For the management and construction of new housing, there is a component that remains with the department for ongoing R&M housing management. The only transfer that occurs across from us to DPI, as I understand it, is the capital component.

Dr LIM: Minister, if I can ask this question for your officers to explain in further detail: the money will be transferred across to Infrastructure and Planning for them to use to build new homes wherever you determine?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greateorex, I will ask Ms Angus to respond to that question. What was the last bit, just to clarify it?

Dr LIM: I am asking whether the money, the \$64m minus whatever you retain, will be transferred to the department of Infrastructure and Planning to use to provide new homes for you.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, yes, it is accurate that minister McAdam has transferred the capital construction component of the Indigenous Housing program to DPI. However, minister McAdam retains the policy position for all of indigenous housing.

In respect of our of relationship to DPI, there is a service level agreement that clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of both agencies, and monies are not transferred across until such time as a program - currently we operate on a three-year rolling program - has been negotiated and agreed with DPI - and that is assessed against a needs measurement model and the monies are released on progress payments. So the money is not just given across for DPI to spend; it is done within a policy framework and within the bilateral agreement. The program is developed together with the technical officers from within DPI with our policy people.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I am hearing is that you will, in fact, retain the \$64m, but will undertake with DPI that you buy a particular program from them and, once they have completed it, you actually pay them the amount that it cost for them to deliver the particular program. You are buying a service from them with the money?

Mr McADAM: That is correct.

Dr LIM: So you, in fact, will control the pace of the construction of homes and not DPI?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greateorex, I approve the program and DPI, the construction agency, manages delivery of that approved program.

Dr LIM: All right, that makes me feel more comfortable than to hear that you passing \$64m across to DPI for them to deliver homes for you as they see fit. That would give me a fit.

Is the Papunya model still the way that homes are being constructed in the bush, or have you gone past that to somewhere else now?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greateorex, I will ask Ms Angus to answer that.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, the original Papunya model, which eventually became the Central Remote Regional model, did mark the way forward for original approach to service delivery. So, the principles and concepts still apply, and it is certainly the direction the program is heading down. All of the specific components of the original Papunya model may not be still there but, in respect of a larger regional service delivery, that has remained intact, as with the promotion and encouragement of local apprentices and local training.

Dr LIM: Thank you. A question was asked by the member for Nelson a while ago. I cannot remember whether it was during debate in the Chamber or in here. Do we have a fixed number of models of homes that will be used so that we are not redesigning every new home that is built out bush? I recall that the Papunya model was, in fact, such a system where you have a single series of six or seven homes, from which the community will choose. Is this how you continue to provide new homes?

Mr McADAM: You would be aware of the statement that I delivered in the House - I think it was last week - and I spoke about it previously. There is an issue of the increasing costs of housing, not only in design but also the actual construction costs out there on the ground. As you would be aware, we have announced a five-point plan in respect of indigenous housing. I do not have all those details in front of me but, specifically, the area that you referred to, I have indicated the idea is to engage people across the Territory, including the private sector, in looking at new models or options of how we provide housing.

On 11 July, there will be a one-and-a-half day workshop in Darwin. We are getting in people from the private sector, indigenous organisations, the construction industry and builders who have actually been on the ground to ask ourselves: 'Can you do it better?' Credit has to be given of what has occurred in the past - and I refer to both governments because it has been the biggest challenge.

It is time that we confronted it ourselves and asked: 'What are we doing now? Is it good enough?' If it is, then you have a look at it; but if we are not, how do we do it better? That is the idea behind this workshop. Effectively, we are talking about a mix of private, public and home ownership. It is important to note that the issue confronting us in the Northern Territory is not unique to us; it is something that is being experienced in Queensland, Western Australia and, indeed, all the states, particularly in the remote regions. I am pleased to say, as a result of a meeting that we had with the Housing ministers and minister Brough, there is a consensus of what I described in my statement. There are some differences, of course, but I do not think they are insurmountable.

The issue you asked about was the actual design of houses and so on. I think that is where you are coming from. I will ask Trish or Mr Alexander to address this because my understanding is that we did commission a design under the old IHANT Board in respect of housing. As you know, the cost of steel, cement, labour, freight, and fuel has just blown out of proportion. Unfortunately, it hits the Northern Territory and, more so, it hits the bush communities.

It is an issue over which, hopefully, we can engage key industry bodies, private sector and indigenous organisations to look at how we might be able to value add to what we have in the dollars because that is important. How do you value add? Is there any capacity to develop a manufacturing industry in the Northern Territory? Get away from the notion of it being welfare housing or indigenous housing - get away from that notion - and ask the question: how do you value add to that dollar base? We cannot work off the assumption that the Commonwealth government is going to continue to fund at their present levels into the future. They may. We hope they continue to do so. There will always be a drain on the dollar in respect of public housing. It is the right time now to look at how we can value add to what we have and there is a great opportunity to do that.

On the design, which I think was your initial question, Ms Angus will answer that.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, yes, you are correct. There were six standard design houses initially for the Papunya model and, in the Top End, a similar exercise happened. Standard designs were developed around both sustainability and functionality of the community of people using them; therefore, they were involved. As the minister has just explained, this workshop is designed to re-examine the standard designs and see whether there is a more cost-effective way to deliver houses. The cost of housing construction in remote areas has increased 275% since 1996 for the reasons the minister outlined. Clearly, we need to revisit that but, at the same time, not retract from those nine healthy living practices that are essential for good living and sustainability and functionality for people using them.

Dr LIM: Minister, in relation to the workshop you propose to hold in about two weeks time, it is not going to deliver the first home for a minimum of 12 to 18 months. The workshop will not deliver a new home for at least 12, if not 18 months. That is my proposition to you. In the interim, is the current program continuing as is? If it is, are we not just treading water for the next 12 months instead of making a dent in the deficit of housing that we already have?

Mr McADAM: The issue about this workshop, which will be held on 11 July - your question was whether it will deliver one new home in 18 months. I say yes. I will take you up on that, and I will say yes.

Dr LIM: In 12 to 18 months you will deliver?

Mr McADAM: I would definitely say yes; that we will deliver a home at a lesser cost than we have today. I will tell you why that will occur. Essentially, we are saying to people around the place: 'What have we done regarding where we are, and how do we go forward?' I can confidently say to you we have had opportunities. I have made it a real commitment of mine to get out there and talk to the construction

industry, the private sector, some of the building companies, and to indigenous organisations, the existing ICHOs. I will make this commitment: I guarantee you that we will certainly have provided one comparable house at a lesser cost within that time frame.

You know how you do that? You do it by talking to people and giving them the challenge and providing the incentive. I cannot be prescriptive in how it is going to go beyond that but, obviously, you cannot continue to build two and three houses in different communities on a yearly basis over two years because that is not cost effective. You are not going to get the training and employment outcomes and you have to look at the economies. You only do that by looking at a whole range of other ideas, but I am very confident that the outcome will be achieved.

I think you asked another question, too, and you are leading to the fact that there is a perception out there that the Northern Territory government has underspent its dollars significantly. That is where you were heading?

Dr LIM: No, minister. You read me wrong altogether.

Mr McADAM: That is what you say.

Dr Lim: Let me put it to you again.

Mr McADAM: No, I would like to continue, if I may, because there is a view out there that says there has been a significant underspend in the Northern Territory. I know the minister for Indigenous Affairs basically said that there was underspend in the vicinity of something like \$18m. I want to place on the record that the claim is totally inaccurate. It was vehemently refuted as well by the Western Australian and Queensland governments. It is important to understand that. It is for that reason, Mr Chairman, I table a letter that I have written to Mal Brough refuting his allegation that there has been an underspending in the Northern Territory. I seek leave to table that.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Certainly, minister.

Dr LIM: All right, minister. You say ...

Mr McADAM: I have not finished yet, member for Greatorex. There was also an editorial in *The Australian* the other day which, in effect, implied the same thing; that we had this significant underspend. Mr Chairman, I would like to read that letter into the record.

Dr LIM: Oh, do not read it into the record. You tabled it.

Mr McADAM: No, this is another letter.

Dr LIM: We are trying to interrogate the budget and you are trying to make a statement. Come on, fair go!

Mr McADAM: No, it is very important, Mr Chairman.

Mrs Braham: Not all of it.

Mr McADAM: No, I can assure you it is only about three minutes. However, the longer we talk, obviously, the longer we are going to have to wait, but I will be very quick. It is to the Editor:

Dear Sir, I am writing in response to an editorial published on 19 June 2006, 'The Housing Crisis Shows how old ideas fail Aborigines'.

I would like to rectify the unfounded accusations made in this article ...

Dr LIM: Mr Chairman, I am really having a great rapport with the minister and I do not want to be negative, but this is out of order. It is not necessary. Table the letter and we will read it ourselves and then we can progress with the estimates.

Mr McADAM: Well, you are wasting time. I was only going to be another two minutes.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Yes, I agree with you with the first part. We are having a good one and that is why I have allowed this discourse to go on. It is great and I commend everyone for it. I do not think this is going to detract from it. Let us get through it in two minutes, get it out of the way and then keep going the way we are. Minister.

Mr McADAM: Thank you.

I would like to rectify the unfounded accusations made in this article relating to the perceived inability of the Northern Territory to expend indigenous housing monies despite great indigenous housing need.

Over the past three years, the Northern Territory has received a total of \$130m from the Australian government including Community Housing and Infrastructure Programs, otherwise known as CHIP, and the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program. It is expected that \$7m will be carried over into 2006-07 or 5.4% of total funds provided to the NT under various indigenous housing programs from 2002-03 to 2004-05.

This amount is insignificant in the proportion of the whole of the Northern Territory's program, particularly when receipt of funding from the Australian government is often late in the financial year.

This can be demonstrated by the Australian government's Indigenous Housing funding receipts for CHIP in the past three years of \$50.7m. Around 26% of these CHIP funds were received by the Northern Territory in June, one month short of the end of the year. Similar trends are experienced in respect to the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program.

Further to this, between 2002-03 and 2003-04, less than 1% of the total Australian government funding receipts were received in July/August. This is the busiest period of the year for the construction industry in the Territory and the time of the year we need funding most.

Carryover funds traditionally tide us over for these busy months while we wait for the release of funding from the Australian government later in the financial year. It is therefore clear that the Northern Territory has done well to achieve an under-expenditure of only \$7m given the consistent delays of the Australian government in providing funds to jurisdictions.

I am confident that the Northern Territory will fully expend and get maximum outcomes from a larger Indigenous Housing Program and greater Australian government funding.

It is important that I place that on the record. I table that letter as well.

Dr LIM: Minister, you misinterpreted what I said altogether. I said that you intended to call the workshop in two weeks and - whatever the outcome from the workshop; you obviously feel very positive about that - it will not deliver you a new home for at least 12, if not 18 months. This is what I said. I did not ask you to guarantee that you would put up a new house. You could put up a new house tomorrow and then not build another one for the next 10 years. You will have achieved nothing.

What I am saying is that the workshop will not deliver a new home for a minimum of 12 months, if not 18 months. However, what I am asking of you is: what will happen in the interim? That is between now and the commencement of the new program, which you hope to develop in two weeks time. I hope you are not going to continue to tread water because, as you said, for the last five years, you have not made a dent in the deficit of housing stock in the Northern Territory. Your construction program for the last five years has only maintained the *status quo* in numbers, and not improved on housing numbers. I am asking: what are you going to do to at least accelerate the housing construction program?

Mr McADAM: I am happy to respond to that, Mr Chairman. I want to respond to some of your assertions. You used some figures about the same number of houses being built over the same period of time.

Dr LIM: No, no.

Mr McADAM: You did. That is my understanding. You said a figure as being no increase. I thought I explained to you and made it very clear why the same number of houses that were built five years ago are not built today. I need not go into it other than to say that there has been a significant increase in a whole range of costs right across the industry. Of course, you throw on top of that the remoteness of the Northern

Territory in terms of freight charges, and it is very logical to understand why you would not be building the same number of houses. It is for that very reason why we are going down this path, which we announced the other day, of public/private home ownership-type arrangement, looking at ways and means of driving down the cost of housing through these partnership arrangements.

Number one is that we will deliver at least a house or a number of houses at a reduced cost. That must auger well, because that is a challenge for us, for people in my department. I know the private sector wants to get onto this. I cannot remember what I was going to say.

Dr LIM: It is getting very late, minister. If I can progress with the next question? No matter how many houses you build for whatever amount of money you receive or have, unless you have a living skills program intimately tied to living in a home, those homes are not going to last very long. You said yourself that housing stock in the bush may last 10 to 13 years, whereas a house in an urban area lived in by mainstream Australians will last 30 to 50 years. Therein lies the problem. You will never be able to catch up. What living skills program do you have in place or are you planning to develop in conjunction with the new homes?

Mr McADAM: In 2005-06, there was a life skills program rolled out with a total value of \$1.4m. The recipients of those programs were Yilli Rreung here in Darwin; Tangentyere Council, Lajamanu Community Government Council, Ngarutjara, Ntaria Council and Anmatjere Council. Presently, we are assessing applications from Amoonguna and Mabunji, and Ngarutjara has come back for another one. Obviously, we are responding where appropriate. I did say in that speech that we would invite applications from communities to submit life skill-type programs. Yes, we acknowledge the fact that we do need life skills programs to complement any housing program. We are doing that. The idea down the track is that, when appropriate, you would roll those out into those communities that wanted to avail themselves of it.

I come back to my initial point: you have the life skills-type program competing against construction costs, and you have a finite amount of money. The challenge is how do you bring down some of these costs so that you can put in some of these other programs. At the moment, we are doing it, but we would like to do it at a greater level and we will continue to encourage ICHOs or community organisations out there, particularly in the bush, to submit applications and we will do what we can.

Dr LIM: The question is: do you follow up on these project officers who deliver the Living Skills program to ensure that they are delivering those programs and not just getting a wage and doing very little?

Mr McADAM: I ask Ms Angus to answer that on the operational side.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, yes, the intention is that these life skills programs become embedded and integrated into the housing management programs at all of these communities so that they are not just a one-off project; they become ongoing. That is reviewed regularly by our staff on the ground. In addition to what the minister said, right now - this week, in fact - in Barkly there are workshops for remote area ICHOs looking at this very thing, plus other asset and tenancy management services. Last week, a similar exercise happened in the East Arnhem area, and the same exercise will happen in each region. A key component of it will be encouraging and assisting establishment of these life skill programs.

Dr LIM: Minister, in the list that you read out just now, you included organisations such as the Tangentyere Council. Obviously, what you meant by that is that they deliver Living Skills programs into urban housing. I suppose urban housing are relevant clients as well. Is that right?

Mr McADAM: The Tangentyere Living Skills program applies in respect to the new suburbs, or the old arrangement in terms of the town camps and new suburbs. However, there is also provision, which Territory Housing has funded, which allows them to go into public housing in Alice Springs itself. We should not have duplication, so what we are saying is that where possible - and we would like to see this rolled out across the rest of the place - one of the things that we wanted to ensure was that it was a specific to the Tangentyere program; that if you have those skills that you can apply to a town camp situation, why not apply them to the public housing sector? I believe they are still advertising a position.

The other thing which might be of interest is that we will be looking to incorporate, as part of that in the next stage, what we call a cluster management model or a more case-managed model where you are mainly able to identify in both areas. You might be able to identify that, for instance, there could be some tenants who are getting themselves into trouble or being impacted upon by people who are coming in and overcrowding, and you get the resultant issues from that. What we would like to do down the track is to add

to the actual Living Skills program to incorporate a more case-managed model, quite apart from just the life skills type arrangement. It could well be the situation where X number of houses in X number of suburbs ...

Dr LIM: Okay. So, minister, what you are saying is that bodies like the Tangentyere Council will be provided with funding to run Living Skills programs not only in the town camps/new suburbs, but also in general housing owned by Territory Housing, such as Larapinta or Sadadeen or wherever. Is that what you are saying?

Mr McADAM: It is important to note that this is a pilot program in Alice Springs on the part of Tangentyere with Territory Housing but, yes, the expectation would be to have a look at some model along those lines. What I wish to emphasise is that it would go out, in the future, to some sort of expression of interest.

Dr LIM: You used the word 'cluster' housing. Are you talking about clusters being a number of homes in a street or a *cul-de-sac*, or are you talking about a cluster of houses being five or 10 in a suburb? What are talking about?

Mr McADAM: It could be a combination of both. If you wish to describe a set of flats as a cluster, that is fine. If there is a need for a managed model, we would look at that. In other circumstances, you could have two houses in the northern suburbs of Darwin in four or five different suburbs. If you could see how this Tangentyere life skills program works, but we could look at identifying those tenants in need of extra support. That is what we would like to do.

Dr LIM: Minister, I do not have a high confidence level with the way Tangentyere Council has delivered its Living Skills programs because of past experience. Their track record has not been particularly good. There are other organisations such as the Alice Springs Aboriginal Urban Housing Association which does run Living Skills programs where they support indigenous families moving to a urban living environment, and I believe deliver much more hands-on support in being there over and over again to ensure that the families do upskill. I did not hear that name in your list. Are you proposing to at least approach them or consider them as an option to organisations such as Tangentyere Council?

Mr McADAM: As I said to you, this is a pilot program. It is a pilot project. I will get the department to answer. We went through a pretty lengthy process, but one of the things that I thought was worth a go in regards to Tangentyere - and this does not in any way discount ASAUHA into the future - is that you have a linkage with the town camps at the moment. There have been many issues with town camps, as you would be aware, over the last 12 months in particular, and some things happening in the suburbs of Alice Springs. Because of Tangentyere's exposure to town camps, they were selected.

Tangentyere should be given great credit for what it has done over the last few years. Okay, like a lot of organisations, they grow and change. Tangentyere is changing again because no one should underestimate the decision by Tangentyere Council in regard to these new arrangements where they effectively come under the Alice Springs municipal council. We should never underestimate that, and nor should we underestimate the decision by the town council regarding its relationship with Tangentyere. To me, that really means that we are going to see some significant, constructive change in both sectors of the community.

That is my response as to why I think Tangentyere's is appropriate, but that does not discount ASAUHA at some time in the future. If we go to this cluster management model in Alice Springs, separate from the Tangentyere one, ASAUHA would have the opportunity to be considered. However, as I said to you earlier, it is going to be an expression of interest approach.

Dr LIM: Yes. Would you consider that may be there is room for both organisations to provide support for Living Skills programs in Alice Springs?

Mr McADAM: At some time in the future, we will be going out to an expression of interest for an expanded Living Skills program in Alice Springs. ASAUHA are one of probably a number of others who might want to express interest, so what I am saying is that we would not discount them the opportunity.

Dr LIM: One last question before I pass it on: the Chief Minister stood side by side with the federal minister for Indigenous Affairs and announced a joint \$30m package for improvement of the town camps and associated activities in Alice Springs. Will you be responsible for at least the Northern Territory portion of that \$30m? I think the Northern Territory will contribute \$10m over two years, and I believe the federal government committed \$20m. Will you be responsible for that funding?

Mr McADAM: I can confirm my understanding is - and I answered this in part previously - that there is a \$30m commitment of which the Commonwealth has committed \$20m, and the Northern Territory government's contribution is \$10m - \$5m and \$5m over two years. The breakdown of that money is in two parts: one is supported management accommodation, which will take some of the pressure off the town camps for people visiting for footy, shopping, renal treatment, and mothers bringing babies in who are ill. There will be a proportion of that money which will go for that purpose. My understanding is that a portion of it will also go to some upgrades on the new suburbs. Given that, I would say it is my department which will be responsible for both those programs.

Dr LIM: Do you know where the source of the funds will be from in the Territory contribution? It is not written anywhere in the budget papers. These were published long before the \$5m was committed for the next 12 months. Do you know whether the money is going to be there for you to implement the program?

Mr McADAM: The Chief Minister would not have made the announcement if the money was not there. I know the money is there; it is \$10m over a two-year period and it will be coming from the Indigenous Housing program.

Dr LIM: So the \$5m each year will be coming out of what has been already allocated?

Mr MCADAM: In certain ...

Dr LIM: There is not extra money here? The \$5m over two years - \$5m for 2006-07 and \$5m for 2007-08 - is it coming out of the budget allocation as we see on page 255, of \$64m? Is the first \$5m coming out of that?

Mr DILLION: Dr Lim, I can provide response. Of the \$30m, the federal government is putting in \$20m; \$10m from the Aboriginal Benefits Account, which is there under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* for the benefit of the indigenous people in the Territory.

Dr LIM: I know what it is, yes.

Mr DILLION: There is \$10 m from Connecting Neighbours, which is a joint program announced by minister Ah Kit and Senator Scullion a couple of years ago. The federal government is putting in the dollars, but Northern Territory, importantly, is making a commitment to pick up the recurrent funding once they upgrade the capital. The third component is \$10m from the Indigenous Housing Program, which is the matter we are dealing with here. We normally have a three-year program. By extending the program out by four years, we then encompass the \$10m within that program without affecting any of the existing commitments by more than a short period.

Dr LIM: Minister, I put to you then, by doing that your housing construction program will degrade somewhat because some of the money is diverted to the town camps program.

Mr McADAM: No, the term 'degrade' you used is wrong, because I do not think it does that at all. As Mr Dillon indicated, of the \$10m, we have priorities; things come up. Notwithstanding the fact that there is a great need right across the Northern Territory, it was appropriate for this decision to be made. Quite frankly, we have had to defer some programs that could have happened in the next two years out to a four-year wait. What I am trying to say is that is what governments are elected for, to make decisions about prioritising issues that arise. That is the reality. We certainly make no apologies about that decision.

Dr LIM: Minister, I understand that the \$30m is, to use the federal jargon, to normalise the town camps. In other words, roads will be built to the standard of suburban streets. There will be street lighting, water, power, and sewerage will be upgraded. Water, sewerage and power will continue to be the responsibility of the Northern Territory government. Roads will become municipal roads and council will have to maintain those roads. I am not certain how the ongoing funding is going to take place, understanding that the federal government does provide through the Grants Commission for municipal roads and the maintenance thereof.

I see those things happening as a matter of course. The \$30m will deliver power, water, sewerage and roads, and then be taken on for ongoing maintenance by the Northern Territory government and the municipal council. Housing is the next big question. What is left out of \$30m will then go to upgrading the homes plus building, potentially, five dwellings for temporary use. Are you going to achieve that in the next two years?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorex, when you are talking about \$30m, of which a lot of it is capital, there are going to be some real issues. It will be a big ask to complete the total program in two years. We have to be pretty straight upfront about that. I am talking about the Commonwealth as well, not just the NT, in terms of labour, skills and that sort of stuff. Nonetheless, that is what we have said.

To be frank, I am not aware of all the Commonwealth details in regards to their \$20m other than the \$10m that was referred to for infrastructure upgrades. I do know about the NT government dollar contribution and what the intent is in respect of those dollars.

Dr LIM: Minister, if I put to you that if you spend \$15m a year in the town camps for the next two years bringing in a lot of labour from the people who are living in the town camps, you will get a lot of activity in the town. It might be a very positive move provided the political will is there to see that through in the two-year period.

Mr McADAM: Do you mean in terms of employment and economic opportunities?

Dr LIM: As well, yes.

Mr McADAM: Yes, that is very true. I will take further advice on this, but I expect it will go out to a tender process. Of course, indigenous organisations will be encouraged to tender. I agree with you; there are big opportunities. In all honesty, I share your worry about the two-year period. In reality, we have to accept that it may not occur in that two-year period, but I would like to see it happen, particularly our component of the \$10m.

Dr LIM: Minister, what I would like to see is that it happens within two years because that concentrated effort would make a huge impact for the community of Alice Springs, black and white combined. The longer you spread it out, the lesser the impact and the fewer benefits you will have. I urge you strongly to do that within the two-year period.

Mr McADAM: Thank you, member for Greatorex. I want to add that, quite apart from the supported management option, you would also be aware the Stuart Lodge is presently under way ...

Dr LIM: Yes.

Mr McADAM: ... in the same model, supported accommodation.

Dr LIM: It has taken a long time.

Mr McADAM: It has taken a long time but, as you will be aware, there was a design issue which blew it out a bit and meant we had to bring it back within the dollars, the same amount of money. We had to re-scope it. That, potentially, will provide an extra 33 beds in Alice Springs. There was further allocation to Aboriginal Hostels Limited, of which you would be aware ...

Dr LIM: Very much so.

Mr McADAM: ... in terms of the Renner Street proposal. My understanding is that they have planning approval, if I remember correctly. My advice is that is also going to provide 20 extra beds in Alice. That is quite a reasonable effort over the last couple of years to address some of these issues. We know we have a lot more to do. That is why I come back to the point that I always make: you have to engage new ideas, and that is what I am talking about for indigenous housing.

Dr LIM: When you go to tender for the upgrade of homes in the new suburbs, you could write within your tender that they engage local labour as well.

Mr McADAM: Yes, I do not disagree. Perhaps Ms Angus might like to comment.

Ms ANGUS: Yes, Dr Lim, that can be written into the procurement. It is already within the guidelines for indigenous housing. Work for the upgrades will go through a proper NT government procurement process.

Dr LIM: Okay. That was the process we put in place with IHANT ...

Ms ANGUS: That is right. It is still there.

Dr LIM: ... and the funding model, etcetera. I would like to see that continue. Minister, are you involved with or are you aware of where managed accommodation will be constructed in Alice Springs?

Mr McADAM: No, I am not. What I can say is that I have had preliminary discussions regarding this idea of supported accommodation. What will happen, and it is going to happen pretty quickly, but I will be advised on this, is that we are going out to what we call - I am just trying to think of the word - basically, going out to an expression of interest and ...

Dr LIM: To volunteer land or ...

Mr McADAM: Sorry?

Dr LIM: To volunteer land? An expression of interest in what regard?

Mr McADAM: If I could continue, I do not have the wording but I know that people from my office were down there last week having discussions. The latest advice I received was that there would be an expression of interest that would be put out in Alice Springs for the development of managed supported accommodation, which could potentially incorporate land and housing models. It could be one or a combination of one and the other. What I have said to you is accurate, but it is land and accommodation.

Dr LIM: Are you talking about clusters of homes, land and managed accommodation, or is it a package?

Mr McADAM: It could be all of those things. The one constant will be it will have to be supported managed accommodation. That is the one constant. People will have the opportunity when they come into Alice Springs to live in a safe, secure environment, particularly for our women and kids. That is one of the things that we have said: it has to be managed. The other expectation is that there would have to be a cost recovery on the part of whoever wins the tender in terms of the overnight stays.

Dr LIM: The operator will have to charge a nightly tariff?

Mr McADAM: Yes, they will apply a rate.

Dr LIM: Allow me, Mr Chairman, to have a preamble. One of the things that I find most unsatisfactory about living in Alice Springs is the fences that surround town camps. It creates a separation and a distinction between them and us. Will the new supported accommodation, in whatever form, have a fence? If you do not have a fence, and I see the contradiction and I have a problem with it myself, how do you provide security? If you put up a fence, you are still creating a them-and-us situation.

Mr McADAM: I do not think I could be prescriptive about how people are going to come back to us with design and security arrangements. I do not know that. People have not come back to us. My response would be that in certain locations, a fence is a prerequisite to security, and in other locations it may not be. The idea is that when the expressions of interest go out, we will receive applications from people who want to undertake the exercise.. I am certain that the department would take into consideration all those things you referred to. You mentioned the fences around some of the town camps. I know a lot of people in Alice Springs do not feel very happy about them. I know a lot of indigenous people do not feel very happy about them. That is part of this new proposal for the new arrangement with the Alice Springs Town Council.

Quite properly, what occurs is the same as if you own a house in Alice Springs. There is a degree of maintenance or landscaping that occurs in your street, and the expectation is that, under this new arrangement, things like fences and landscaping and incorporating Ipiye-Ipiye or Mt Nancy or some of those areas as part of a suburb is the way to go. That is the idea. Just because it happens to sit outside a housing association body managed by Tangentyere, the view out there regarding that area of land which is under a municipal council is that: 'It is their land, they have to fix it up'. It is a point that we have been making all along. What we are trying to say is people who live on town camps: you pay rates and the same sort of services apply. I know I have digressed a little, but it is in the context of security fencing on the town camps.

Dr LIM: Minister, we have been talking together for nearly three-and-a-half hours and we have agreed on a lot of issues. I am very glad that you and I see very much eye to eye on many things.

Mr CHAIRMAN: I hate to break this magic spell that seems to be developing, perhaps a five minute break so that they can get back into their corners and do a bit of sparring would be wonderful.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIRMAN: We will recommence hearings. It is 10.08 pm. Shadow minister, please continue your line of interrogation.

Dr LIM: I will give it a rest and pass it on.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions in relation to this output?

Mrs BRAHAM: Surprise, surprise; yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Please, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, let me get it clear in my mind: the \$64m we are talking about is what we used to call IHANT money for indigenous housing?

Mr McADAM: My advice, member for Braitling, is that it incorporates NAHS.

Mrs BRAHAM: NAHS as well? That is good.

Mr McADAM: It includes the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program and CHIP.

Mrs BRAHAM: The builders out there are really going to love you when this all gets going because it has been a bit slow lately. You are going to give DPI a project to build some houses using some of that money. Is DPI going to charge you 18% like they normally do for contracts?

Mr McADAM: I will seek clarification.

Mrs BRAHAM: Well, good luck if you can get it done cheaper, or they might end up charging more.

Mr McADAM: The part managed by DPI will be charged at 18%. Those contracted outside of that will incur – I have a revised figure here. It will be 10% and 12% for construction purposes; not the 18% I referred to.

Mrs BRAHAM: Sorry?

Mr McADAM: Between 10% to 12% for construction; that will be the fee.

Mrs BRAHAM: That is good because it is normally 18%. As well as that, you are going to have project managers or the builders, whoever gets the contract for building. In fact, each time you get an additional cost, less and less is left for building of the house.

Mr McADAM: Well, in almost all instances, member for Braitling, that cost is inclusive.

Mrs BRAHAM: What? DPI's cost? No.

Mr McADAM: No, because DPI will be managing it.

Mrs BRAHAM: They will be managing, but whoever has the contract usually has a project manager who will then supervise building the houses.

Mr McADAM: I might be confusing myself here, member for Braitling. I will defer to Mr Dillon.

Mr DILLON: I am advised that there are three different ways that houses will be built. The first is the old model where there will be some continual projects that go to ICHOs and they will hire their own project managers and build the houses. That will not be charged at the 18%. There will be some where DPI do the construction themselves and they will charge 10% to 12%. There will be some where DPI provide a contract or project manager under the regional model. That will also ...

Mrs BRAHAM: Whatever, yes. Okay. So, the Business Division of Territory Housing, when they build complexes such as the seniors' village, they manage the contract themselves. Is that right?

Mr McADAM: My advice is that if it goes through DPI, that percentage will apply. In the case of Territory Housing managing it, it does not apply.

Mrs BRAHAM: I have seen contracts allocated through Territory Housing. The point I am making, minister, is that I find it strange that Indigenous Housing is placed in Lands and Infrastructure, or whatever they call themselves these days. Would it not be better kept within the Business Division of Territory Housing? That is part of their brief, anyway.

Mr McADAM: Ms Angus will respond.

Ms ANGUS: Mrs Braham, the intention with moving in to DPI this current financial year was to try and get economies of scale and grouping together of projects that are, perhaps, more than just housing. There may be school facilities, education facilities that are construction work, but DPI also currently - and Territory Housing can correct me if I am incorrect - manage government employment housing in remote areas, so that way there would be a grouping up of projects, and we hope that reduces the cost.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is it strange that the indigenous housing construction is not within the Department of Housing. Minister, you will, obviously, have some input the workshop on design you were talking about. Will you be encouraging for remote houses to have water tanks?

Mr McADAM: I personally encourage people to have rainwater tanks, particularly those people who live in remote regions. However, I am also aware that there are some health implications. The project depends upon a whole set of circumstances that you have to weigh up at the time. I am no expert in this area of rainwater tank design technology. If the technology is there which, in effect, negates some of the environment and/or health problems that might arise, surely there must be an advantage to that.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, there are some very good models around now. They have changed from the old round water tank. Also at places like Yuelamu, water had to be trucked because they ran out of drinking water, if you recall. There are advantages in putting tanks in, so I am giving a plug there. Would you also make sure, as part of these contracts, there is Aboriginal employment and training?

Mr McADAM: Absolutely. It is very important that we build upon the resource base out there of indigenous people. Ms Angus referred to it when she talked about economies of scale. I have referred to it previously. Where you build one or two houses in small communities or different locations, it is very difficult to get training outcomes. However, if you were to link it through a process that incorporates maybe 10 to 15 or 20 houses, it could be a mix of government employee or a mix of schools. Then you will be getting to a stage where you are in a reasonable position to be able to know that your program might roll out over three, four, even five years. Therefore, that makes it possible. Clearly, we would most certainly be looking to improve employment and training opportunities for people who live out in the communities.

Mrs BRAHAM: Will you also have some sort of component to make sure that community councils get contracts?

Mr McADAM: Of course, community councils will be in a position to tender. They will have the same opportunity as other organisations, be it existing ICHOs or the private sector. Most certainly, we encourage councils and the ICHOs to tender and undertake construction.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, you talked about the workshop and design, who will make the final decision on what design goes on to different communities? Will it be the community themselves?

Mr McADAM: You referred to the workshop?

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes.

Mr McADAM: As I said, the idea of the workshop is to open all this up so that we can have a look at other opportunities that might be there in design, material and construction costs. Whatever path we go down, we would have to ensure that the housing design itself is suitable for people in remote regions. It is fair to say that if someone came to us and wanted build a four-bedroom house without verandas or that was totally incompatible to bush conditions, we probably would not want to look at it. That is why I am saying we need to be very certain to make sure that what is provided is what people want.

Mrs BRAHAM: Thank you, minister. That is all, Mr Chairman.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions?

Mrs MILLER: No. My questions have been answered.

Mr CHAIRMAN: They are a very thorough lot, member for Katherine. That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – Aboriginal Interpreter Services

Mr CHAIRMAN: I now call for questions on Output 2.4, Aboriginal Interpreter Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Are you talking about the Aboriginal Interpreter Services? One question: Aboriginal Interpreter Services have always been much required in the Northern Territory, especially in the court system. As you know, the court system has deferred some cases because of a lack of interpreters, yet I see that you have lost \$82 000 from this year's budget, which will translate to the loss of one interpreter. Minister, surely we have to keep that up so that the numbers are adequate for services required in the Northern Territory.

Mr McADAM: Member for Grotorex, I will ask Ms Angus to respond to that.

Ms ANGUS: Dr Lim, it is not a loss in budget. It shows that way because there were two projects last year that were Commonwealth funded, and that shows a decrease because that project finishes. We had a language conservation project that was funded through DCITA. Historically, the interpreter services receives funding in June before the end of financial year to run one-off projects. The same thing happened last year, too, so there has been no decrease in funding.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that explanation, minister. It was something that I could not find in the key variations. Perhaps we should do that next year.

Mr McADAM: Might I also add just for information that you will be aware that the Commonwealth government has renewed their funding arrangements with the Northern Territory government for the next four years, and that was \$4.57m over that period of time.

Dr LIM: For interpreter services?

Mr McADAM: For interpreter services, and we appreciate that. That is good. However, I want to express some disquiet. Again, it is something that we will take up. Of that \$4.57m, there is an administrative fee the Commonwealth government will apply, which is \$524 000. Over \$0.5m of that will go as an administrative fee or a holding fee, to transfer money through. As I said, I express some disquiet but, having said that, we will take it up with the Commonwealth government. It gives certainty for people wanting to access the service and for the police, hospitals, Health and, most importantly, for the indigenous interpreters.

Dr LIM: Okay. No other questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No further questions? That being the case, that concludes Output 2.4 and it includes Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – HOUSING SERVICES **Output 3.1 - Housing Services**

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, Housing Services; Output 3.1, Housing Services. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Minister, I always get confused between Housing Services and the GBD. Can you explain the difference?

Mr McADAM: I feel the same way.

Dr LIM: I am glad to hear that.

Mr McADAM: I am getting there but, for the time being, we will ask Mr Dillon to explain.

Mr DILLON: Thank you, minister. The reason that there is a Housing Services output in the department is that there is a through-put of Community Service Obligations through to the GBD. It is really an accounting mechanism where Treasury pay us the money that we then pay to Territory Housing. In a real sense, the issues that come up in Housing Services should be dealt with under Territory Housing, and it would probably be easier if we did. Basically, it is just a CSO that flows through the department.

Dr LIM: What are the CSOs?

Dr DILLON: That is the community service obligation.

Dr LIM: I know what CSO is, but what are they?

Mr DILLON: It is the difference between the market rents that someone would normally pay for their house and the rebated or subsidised rent that they are actually charged. Because it is a GBD, a government business division, the arrangements are that Treasury will pay the difference to top up the government business division because it is bearing the full market cost of provision of housing, but only charging the subsidised cost.

Dr LIM: May I just ask a question of Mr Dillon? Is this for employee housing such as police, teachers, and other professionals living in Territory Housing stock?

Mr DILLON: We only get the CSO for basically rebated tenancies, largely in public housing. There are a number of specific CSOs that relate to other parts of the GBD.

Dr LIM: I am trying to cite a practical example. Minister, is it a pensioner who is not paying the rate that is calculated and has specifically asked for that rate to be less than what it should be?

Mr DILLON: No, no. Under our public housing system, for example, we normally charge 23% of a person's income. The difference between that amount, the 23% of their income, and the market rent for the house is a calculation of what the CSO is for that particular asset. Treasury goes along and sums up all the differences and that amount is the CSO that is paid to the department. Then, under this output, it is then on-paid to the GBD.

Dr LIM: Okay. So the CSO is only paid to, in fact, people who are not paying the full market rate of the rent of the property.

Mr DILLON: Exactly.

Dr LIM: There are no other types of tenants?

Mr DILLON: I think the General Manager can give you a couple of examples of CSOs that are other issues, but they are very minor.

Mr McADAM: If I may, I will refer this to Ms Fiona Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Dr Lim, we get some minor CSOs under Home Ownership and Government Employee Housing. In most cases, Government Employee Housing pay a rent direct to us, or their agency does. In the case of police, some of it we get direct funding via a CSO for their rental costs. In home ownership, we get some CSOs for some of the old rebated programs that we used to run where there is a differential in the interest rate, and we get some CSOs for interest forgone on our fee assistance loans.

Dr LIM: Okay. Thank you. No further questions.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any further questions in regards to this output? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 3.0. I note that Output Group 4.0 will be addressed by Minister Lawrie on Friday, 23 June.

Non-Output Specific Budget Questions

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any Non-Output Specific Budget related questions? Member for Katherine.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, one I did forget to ask. It is all right, you will be able to answer it from there. I forgot to ask how many Internet services are provided in remote community libraries. Are there any Internet services in any of those?

Mr McADAM: I have been advised that we do not have that exact detail in terms of the numbers, but we will get back to you as soon as we can.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you. I was thinking it is a very good skill for people to learn.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any other questions?

TERRITORY HOUSING

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now move on to Territory Housing. I invite the minister to make an opening statement on behalf of Territory Housing if he so wishes.

Mr McADAM: No, thank you.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – BUSINESS LINE

Mr CHAIRMAN: The committee will now proceed to consider questions regarding the Business Line. Are there any questions?

Dr LIM: Yes, thank you. Minister, I ask this question every year of the Housing minister: are you able to provide me the stock in size of dwelling, how many people are living in Territory Housing, how long are the average waiting times for one-, two- and three- and even four-bedroom residences across the Territory divided into the regions?

Mr McADAM: We do have all the information you require. I suppose the option is ...

Dr LIM: Do not read that because I know it will take you guys 10 minutes to read it out.

Mr McADAM: No, what I am saying is that there is a lot of information.

Dr LIM: Yes.

Mr McADAM: We are prepared to table the numbers and type of housing stock by region, which incorporates one-bedroom right through to eight-bedrooms. That is for public housing and it gives the totals in each of the major regional centres. We are also able to give you the same information of total public housing and government employee housing, which is the combination of both, and public housing. There is stock by age, but that excludes industry housing. That is across the regions and it gives a further breakdown of less than five years right through to dwellings in excess of 31 years. We are prepared to table that if you wish.

Dr LIM: Thank you. Do you have the lists, minister, of waiting times across the regions as well for the same stock of housing?

Mr McADAM: We do have public housing waiting times by months across all the regions and by type of dwelling or the dwelling size. We also incorporate other information, which includes one-bedroom non-pensioner, one-bedroom pensioner, two-bedroom and three-bedroom dwellings. We are prepared to table that.

Dr LIM: Okay, thank you. Minister, we continue to hear that we have difficult neighbours. Every local member would have constituents who complain to them about neighbours from hell. Do we collect a list of the complaints across the regions and how quickly those complaints are resolved?

Mr McADAM: We do have the information, I think. The information is Public Housing Complaints, which incorporates appeals. There is a breakdown of complaints since October 2005. It gives the regional centres and goes on to give figures of those complaints relative to antisocial behaviour. There are also complaints of eligibility issues and the document addresses that. There are bond and assistance and other information, which is also here. There are complaints that fall into the other category; Various Complaints. This information has been collated since October 2005. I am sure it gives much of the information you require. We can table that.

Dr LIM: I am not being sarcastic, but last year we were told that the system was a manual system. Is it computerised now? Good on you. Thank you. Minister, I do not have time to look through the figures that were just tabled, but I note from page 265 of Budget Paper No 3, Business Line Public Housing, that public housing dwellings in total have decreased each year, being 5535 in the year 2004-05. In the book, you see 5436 for this year, then 5407 next year. What is going on? This is page 265 under Performance Measures, Quantity Public Housing Dwellings.

Mr McADAM: You are suggesting that there has been a ...

Dr LIM: I referred to Budget Paper No 3 of last year as well. That figure, if I copied correctly, is 5535. This is 5436. Next year, you have it down to 5407. It is slowly decreasing. To show you that I have not fiddled the numbers; you have a look at my book. It is going down. Something is happening to the number of dwellings.

Mr McADAM: For the sake of accuracy and complete understanding, I ask Fiona Chamberlain to respond to that question.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Dr Lim, there does continue to be some minor reduction in stock of public housing. This is part of the continuing stock management plan for Territory Housing to align stock to need, so there may be some sell off of housing. There will probably be some future development of housing. This is in the context of in the Territory, we still enjoy the very lowest waiting times across the country. We still have some surplus levels of stock in some areas of the Territory which we may dispose of. We also may dispose of some housing stock based on some suburbs where there is a high density of public housing, and where that may add to antisocial behaviour in that community.

Mrs Braham: Good idea.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Yes. We may dispose of stock where a house is of a particular bad design or in such disrepair that we cannot really put it back into tenancies. More importantly, the majority of our stock that is disposed of is on sale to our existing tenants - 65% of disposals are to existing tenants. We do not say no to our tenants so, if they are wishing to purchase the house, we let them purchase it providing they are able to afford that. Even though you are seeing some reductions, some of those people are not missing out on houses; they are becoming home owners.

Dr LIM: Thank you for that explanation. Is the decrease in number of houses owned by Territory Housing causing lengthening of waiting times? I mean that question in general because some would be three-bedrooms and some one-bedroom.

Mr McADAM: I will ask Fiona to address that question but, from the information that I have, there would be some categories of dwelling for which there would be a further waiting period. Fiona will comment.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We have had some increase in wait times right across the Territory, but I must stress that we still have the lowest wait times across Australia. We have average wait times for non-pension dwellings - for general stock - of: one-bedroom, 28 months; two-bedroom, 16 months; and three-bedroom, 25 months. What is important to note, though, is that that is for general people on the waiting list. Quite a percentage of our tenants are now housed by the priority waiting list, which means they are waiting less time. In terms of the national benchmark, we are actually housing 48% of our wait list every year, in comparison to some jurisdictions which are only housing 15% of their wait list in any year.

Mr DILLON: If I may, just to go your specific question, because we reinvest the proceeds from the sale of our assets, the impact on our wait list would be minimal as a result of the sale of assets.

Dr LIM: If you build more. If you do not build more ...

Mr McADAM: There has been a very extensive upgrade of existing Territory Housing stock. My understanding is that this financial year, approximately \$43.5m has been for that purpose. There has been \$19m which has also been derived from the sale of public housing. What we have here is a problem that is of concern and has happened over quite a period of time. You would probably be aware of this; but it is important to note the differences. The previous CLP government sold \$248.2m worth of assets, Territory Housing stock, from 1995-96 through to 2000-01. The reinvestment in respect of the capital works and acquisitions was \$87.2m of that sale of stock. Since 2001-02, the present government has sold \$90.7m worth of assets. Bear in mind those dollars have been pumped back into upgrading existing stock. The figure for reinvestment in capital works and acquisitions is \$152.4m.

Dr LIM: Minister, you cannot expect me to let that go unchallenged.

Mr McADAM: No, but I thought I would place it on the record.

Dr LIM: Well, I tell you what: the Northern Territory government had the shortest, shortest, shortest waiting list ever compared to what you have here now. People were getting houses almost the instant they stepped into the Territory back in our day. We also converted a lot of the sold assets into seniors' villages, which you have continued in your government. That is where all the money has gone. Anyway, be that as it may, as I said, I cannot let that go unchallenged.

Minister, the figures in the budget papers and this list, now that I have had a chance to look at it, do not match. In fact, this list is better. You tell me on this list that you have a total of 5723 homes, residences, versus 5400 in the budget papers. Is this more correct?

Mr McADAM: If I may, I will defer to Mrs Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Dr Lim, it will be because the figures you are looking at will include industry housing and the other figures will not. So there is a bit of a mismatch in what stock has been counted in each set. In regard to the waiting times, the impact on waiting times is more a result of our upgrade of properties and the need to keep a number of properties vacant while we do that which is adding to those wait times as much as anything. So, as we start to see properties come off line back on line, you will see reductions in those wait times.

Dr LIM: All right. Go back to the list you provided of troublesome neighbours. How quickly are the issues resolved when the number of complaints hits the threshold line where Territory Housing takes action?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: With complaints, the issues are resolved as quickly as we can within the confines of the law, basically. There are two ways it can be resolved: we are able to restabilise that tenancy and that tenancy is able to operate effectively back into that community, or we evict. With eviction, we have to go through a court process for that, a legal process, although I will note that many times, because we are working with a tenant through any sort of antisocial behaviour matter, they will often agree to leave voluntarily.

It is difficult to place a time frame on it. A court date can take us up to three months to get in trying to pursue an eviction, and we have to establish a level of evidence that supports that eviction. We believe the new antisocial behaviour legislation, and particularly our Acceptable Behaviour Agreements, are going to quicken that process and, in fact, we are starting to see some of those benefits straight away. We have already written our first Acceptable Behaviour Agreement.

Dr LIM: So Acceptable Behaviour Agreements have been signed? How many have been signed?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: One has been signed, and we are talking about a practice that has been in place for about two weeks now. We have four or five others being developed that should be signed in the next few weeks. We have been out, we have trained every staff person and this approach is starting to take shape and speed.

Dr LIM: What is the cost of repairs of damaged property and ...

Mr McADAM: The average cost?

Dr LIM: The average cost per residence and the global cost per year?

Mr McADAM: Member for Greatorox, I am certain that we do have that information here. Would you be prepared for us to provide that information to you? I have seen it, but we just cannot track it down at the moment.

Dr LIM: All right. Minister, coming back to the Acceptable Behaviour Agreements, I assume that they are going to be implemented across the Territory. Have staff in Territory Housing been trained to implement this program?

Mr McADAM: That is an operational question. Perhaps Fiona could answer.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Yes, we have just finished a tour around the entire Territory with comprehensive training of our staff in the new procedures.

Dr LIM: I look forward to many agreements being signed. Following evictions and the houses are under repair, what is the number of residences that are vacant at any one time? What is the number of vacant residences at any one time? What is the rate of vacancies in Territory Housing?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We run at a 95% occupancy rate, so at any one time we can be about 5% vacant for a variety of reasons. Houses will be in turnaround where they are waiting to be cleaned to put new tenants in, or they may, in fact, be under repair or vacant for other work. That is quite close to national benchmarks for the industry.

Dr LIM: Minister, you said earlier in another output group that you are going to have a workshop in two weeks time to review housing construction designs. What other reviews are there within your department at the moment, and what have you done in the last 12 months?

Mr McADAM: I ask Mr Dillon to respond to that.

Mr DILLON: We have an extensive review program mainly through our audit committee. I suppose the definition of reviews is always problematic, but we have series of internal audits/reviews done by Risk Management Services; we have audits that we initiate ourselves through accounting firms. I have a list here that lists probably about 150 reviews over the last five years. I am not sure it is going to be much help to you, but do you have a specific issue that you would like to ...

Dr LIM: What I am looking for is the number of consultants that you engaged in your department, Local Government and Housing, including specific reviews that you do. I am not interested in your routine audits and the risk management that you do yourselves.

Mr DILLON: In terms of consultancies, you are in the public housing area. Do you want consultancies relating to public housing?

Dr LIM: Would you be able to take it across the board or

Mr McADAM: I am sure we can do that, Michael.

Mr DILLON: Yes, it is your call, minister.

Mr McADAM: Consultancies in respect of Territory Housing for 2005-06, there were nine consultants retained for a total \$140 739. We are happy to table this. It is only specific to Territory Housing. In regards to Local Government and Housing as well, which is separate from Territory Housing, for 2005-06 as of 31 May 2006, there were two consultancies in the governance. This is expenditure, sorry. I beg your pardon, member for Grotorex, in regards to the consultants costs on governance, there was one at a total of \$21 564. We are prepared to table that.

The Library and Indigenous Services, Output Libraries, there was one for a value of \$20 000. There were none in the Community Harmony area. I will table that. The other is Indigenous Housing Services, where there were six for a total cost of \$101 409. There were nine consultancies for the Interpreter Services area at a total cost of \$64 978. I will table that. There was a further cost of \$12 000 across the agency, and I table that.

Dr LIM: Minister, do you have a media unit in the department?

Mr McADAM: We do. To give you the relevant information, Mr Dillon will respond to that.

Mr DILLON: Yes, we do have a media unit. We have a unit called Cross-Agency Coordination and it includes a range of services: secretariat, executive support, some policy support. It also includes public relations, communications and media liaison. It has a total number of staff across the agency of seven, which includes two in Sport and Rec.

Dr LIM: Okay, and that does the job for Local Government, Housing and Sport and Rec?

Mr DILLON: That is right.

Dr LIM: Do you have a list of those specific levels of the officers?

Mr DILLON: There is a Director at the EO1 level, there is at AO6, one at AO5.

Dr LIM: Could you table the list if you have a list there?

Mr DILLON: No, we do not have a list; we are just pulling it together. There is one EO1, two AO6s, two AO5s and, in Sport and Rec, there is an AO6 and an AO4.

Dr LIM: Thank you, I know that time is short. I will conclude and the member for Braitling can ask her question.

Mrs BRAHAM: Two minutes. Through you, Mr Chairman, I have a couple of quick ones.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Quick ones? I look forward to hearing those, member for Braitling.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, last Saturday in Alice Springs three public houses were auctioned, all in the Larapinta area. Could you tell me how many more you intend to auction over the next few months and where the funds are going? Are they for another seniors' village, for instance?

Mr McADAM: Member for Braitling, I defer to Ms Chamberlain.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We are not planning to auction any more at this moment. The minister gave an undertaking that he would seek to reduce density, particularly in the Larapinta area. That is part of what those auctions were about. The money is, without doubt, being reinvested in housing. Our focus at the moment in housing is on the upgrade of our houses. Most of our money is being reinvested into complexes such as Keith Lawrie and to renovating the existing stock.

Mrs BRAHAM: With Larapinta Stage 2, what is going to happen? I do not think has been finalised, but you were going to build a housing complex there. Is that still to go ahead?

Mr McADAM: I am not too sure of the status in respect of the land or the development itself, but the intent of Territory Housing was to make available six houses or blocks which would be part of the HomeNorth Extra scheme. There was also, as I understand it, an opportunity to consolidate seven blocks, which would be for special purpose. That could range from a seniors' village or something else which is compatible with the development.

Mrs BRAHAM: It would be good if it was another seniors' village because, I have to admit, they have been very successful.

Mr McADAM: We all have to look after our own future.

Mrs BRAHAM: Yes, definitely. Put my name down for one. Minister, do you have figures on how much rent has been unpaid throughout the major centres? Do you have a table of that?

Mr McADAM: We do have that information. I cannot say specifically if they relate to the regional centres, but I am sure Fiona will be able to provide the information.

Mrs BRAHAM: Would you table that?

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We can. We may have to get it in terms of regional centres to you, but we certainly have it.

Mr McADAM: We do have total debts 2005-06 up to 31 May 2006. That was \$7.498m. I have given you a total which incorporated rent, tenant responsibility, maintenance, excess water, bond assistance, legal fees. However, in respect to rent, the total amount was \$2.480m.

Mrs BRAHAM: What steps would you take to recover that, minister?

Mr McADAM: Fiona could give far more justice in terms of that, but I am aware that there is a very concentrated debt management strategy in place. I know that it is working out of Palmerston and they are getting some good results, but Fiona would be better to give you the detail.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We have put in place a much more robust debt management strategy. It is premised on acting early. That is across all categories. We have actually reduced the rent debt. Last year, we had a level at \$2.8m; we are now down to \$2.4m. We expect that trend to continue with our new debt management strategy.

We have actually employed a specific debt management officer who is able to go out and collect debts. We have had changes to the legislation so it can link debt in public housing to tenancy. People have to sign up on a payment scheme if they want to continue in their public housing or if they want to re-enter public housing. Yes, the early contact with tenants is having a significant effect. We expect that that figure will continue to reduce.

Mrs BRAHAM: Do you evict people if they are in arrears for large amounts?

Mr McADAM: Yes, we do. Are you asking for figures?

Mrs BRAHAM: That is okay. In your Acceptable Behaviour Agreements, is there a component that deals with the number of visitors?

Mr McADAM: I will ask Fiona to respond.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: The Acceptable Behaviour Agreements have the ability to be moulded, if you like, to each individual case. If the issue is around visitors, then there will be specific requirements for managing those visitors and numbers of visitors causing the behaviour. Our focus always, though, is on behaviour because we do not want to discriminate against someone who has visitors and who is able to manage them and have quiet tenancies. So it will focus on the bad behaviour.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Are there any more questions under that output?

Mrs BRAHAM: I have more questions, but I thought our time was up.

Mr CHAIRMAN: No.

Mrs BRAHAM: Keep going. What time ...

Mr CHAIRMAN: About eight minutes. Never let it be said that I deprived anyone of an opportunity to interrogate the minister.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, New South Wales has put in huge support staff for Acceptable Behaviour Agreements. Do you have additional staff?

Mr McADAM: I will ask Fiona to respond to that.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: We are gearing up with support staff. We have a new focus of supporting our tenants through this process. Part of the Acceptable Behaviour Agreement process is to set up case conferences prior to entering one, at which point we can bring in support for tenancies. We have put on additional indigenous client liaison officers across the Territory. We are running a Palmerston pilot where we have a new focus on the way we manage tenancies, which has a specific support stream in it where there are officers dedicated just to tenancy support.

Mrs BRAHAM: Minister, I believe there is only one Aboriginal liaison officer in the Alice Springs office, and that is a huge amount of work for one person to achieve any results.

Mr McADAM: Fiona.

Ms CHAMBERLAIN: Yes, that is correct, there is one indigenous client liaison officer in Alice Springs. However, they work very closely with ASAUHA, which you have already talked about tonight. ASAUHA receive \$272 000 from us per annum. They also are very much part of the support process for our tenants in Alice Springs. We will certainly be monitoring and evaluating the Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and how that rolls out, and be considering whether there are further resources required.

Mrs BRAHAM: Is the local member able to nominate people to go onto these Acceptable Behaviour Agreements?

Mr McADAM: I will pass that to Fiona.

Mr CHAIRMAN: Just before you do, I would like to say that, on behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for attending today. I also thank those officers who have provided advice to the minister. Thanks, everyone.

Mr McADAM: Mr Chairman, I thank very sincerely all my staff, particularly the people who have been at the table. Thank you very much for your kind contribution, not only tonight but throughout the course of the year. To those people who have been sitting there in the background, thank you very much. Your commitment is much appreciated.

To the people from the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority, I reckon this is about five in a row. Thank you so much for being here as well. I thank Mr Michael Dillon, who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. Michael is leaving. He will be leaving the department in a couple of week's time. Michael, on behalf of everyone, I thank you again for your very professional stewardship of the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport. I know that you have made the place a better place. On behalf of everyone here, thank you very much and we wish you all the very best in the future.

Dr LIM: I am glad that you had a good experience tonight, Mr Dillon, because last year was a bit adversarial.

The committee suspended.
